

## ARTICLE

# We need to talk about Taylor<sup>1</sup> : evidence of racism in scientific management?

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### Abstract

Despite the decolonial and Afro-diasporic criticisms of the field of Management and Organization Studies, the teaching of Business Schools, in general, still presents Administrative Theories in an uncritical and ahistorical way, disregarding the remnants of black slavery and its logic in administrative practices. In this sense, the present work has the general objective of developing the hypothesis that Scientific Theory was ideologically conceived on a racist basis of work organization. In methodological terms, documentary research was carried out on the works of Frederick Winslow Taylor, opposing them to the historical context marked by eugenic elements that cross his worldview, apparently silenced in his works. Therefore, we concluded that the Taylorist theory, justified in the semantics of innate limitations to human nature, will intensify the forms of exploitation of workers, especially on blacks, reflecting, as a supposition, the reproduction of racism in the scope of organizational management.

**Keywords:** Eugenia. Scientific management. Frederick Taylor. Race.

### *Precisamos falar sobre Taylor: indícios de racismo na administração científica?*

#### Resumo

Apesar das críticas decoloniais e afrodiaspóricas no campo dos estudos em gestão e organizações, o ensino nas escolas de administração, de modo geral, ainda apresenta as teorias administrativas de forma acrítica e a-histórica, desconsiderando os resquícios da escravidão negra e da sua lógica nas práticas administrativas. Nesse sentido, o presente trabalho tem por objetivo geral desenvolver a hipótese de que, ideologicamente, a teoria científica foi concebida em uma base racista de organização do trabalho. Em termos metodológicos, foram realizadas pesquisas documentais nas obras de Frederick Winslow Taylor, contrapondo-as ao contexto histórico marcado por elementos eugênicos que atravessavam a sua visão de mundo, aparentemente silenciados em suas obras. Por conseguinte, concluímos que a teoria taylorista, justificada na semântica de limitações inatas à natureza humana, vai intensificar as formas de exploração dos trabalhadores, sobretudo os negros, refletindo, como suposição, a reprodução do racismo no âmbito da gestão das organizações.

**Palavras-chave:** Eugenia. Administração científica. Frederick Taylor. Raça.

### *Tenemos que hablar de Taylor: ¿evidencia de racismo en la gestión científica?*

#### Resumen

A pesar de las críticas decoloniales y afrodiaspóricas al campo de los Estudios de Gestión y Organización, la enseñanza de las Escuelas de Negocios, en general, aún presenta las Teorías Administrativas de manera acrítica y ahistórica, desconociendo los remanentes de la esclavitud negra y de su lógica en prácticas administrativas. En este sentido, el presente trabajo tiene como objetivo general desarrollar la hipótesis de que la Teoría Científica fue concebida ideológicamente sobre una base racista de organización del trabajo. En términos metodológicos, se realizará una investigación documental en las obras de Frederick Winslow Taylor, contraponiéndolas al contexto histórico marcado por elementos eugenésicos que atraviesan su cosmovisión, aparentemente silenciados en sus obras. Por tanto, concluiremos que la teoría taylorista, justificada en la semántica de las limitaciones innatas a la naturaleza humana, intensificará las formas de explotación de los trabajadores, especialmente de nuestros negros, reflejando, como supuesto, la reproducción del racismo en el ámbito de la gestión de organizaciones.

**Palabras clave:** Eugenesia. Gestión científica. Frederick Taylor. Raza.

<sup>1</sup> We paraphrased the title of the movie "We Need to Talk About Kevin". Although the theme talks about a young man who commits homicides in an American high school, we assume, as a background, that racism also reproduces physical, social, and psychological deaths.

## INTRODUCTION

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“I’ve found this slave at the sominghouse!  
Whoever owns it come forward!” (Acayaba, 2018).

The sentence above, uttered by a former student (expelled) from the Getulio Vargas Foundation, was the caption of a photo of a black colleague shared in a WhatsApp group in 2018. The student João Gilberto Lima, a victim of racism, at the time, was in his fourth year of business school at the same institution, one of the most renowned in the field in the country.

Cases like this express the annoyance of white people, historically privileged, who now must share with other politically minority groups the spaces that were traditionally reserved for them (N. S. Souza, 1983).

If tradition is an invention (Hobsbawm, 1984), recent higher education data may indicate discomfort for the group that holds hegemony in these spaces: the business administration course is the third with the highest number of blacks in absolute terms in Brazil<sup>2</sup>. There are 611,136 students who declared themselves black and 302,617 brown, in the last Census of Higher Education (National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira [Inep], 2021), which indicates changes in the profile of university students in recent decades<sup>3</sup>.

While the presence of blacks has increased in graduations, the numbers do not follow the same trend in the professional staff. Of a total of 399,428 higher education professors, only 16.7% declared themselves to be black<sup>4</sup> (Inep, 2021). The data illustrates that, in addition to representativeness, race, a social category that identifies and stratifies human beings, informs class and, among other determinations, hinders the socioeconomic ascension of black people.

Therefore, when a student, such as João Gilberto, accesses content arising from administrative theories, which thinkers understood as classics are considered black? Under what historical perspective did the subjects think about these theories? Consequently, how do the proposed objectives dialogue with the singularities of the majority of the black population in the country?

Ramos (1981), one of the few black authors who dialogued with the area, seemed to bring clues by indicating that administrative theories used a distorted language, whose purpose was to lead people to interpret reality in adequate terms to the interests of agents that promote distortion. Furthermore, he alerted that every national culture is a particular perspective (Ramos, 1996), that the Brazilian perspective exists and that it is necessary to transpose foreign knowledge and experience to our specificity.

In a recent study, Dar, Liu, and Martinez (2021) denounce that business schools in Nordic and Western countries, because they are structured in a white supremacy, reproduce a racist logic that devalues the knowledge and experience of blacks in the production of administrative knowledge. Similarly, Araújo, and Carneiro (2020) and Nkomo (2021) indicate that, despite the increase in publications in the field of organizational studies, race still plays a marginal role on the agenda.

It is in this context that the present work aims to develop the hypothesis that the Theory of Scientific Management, based on Taylorism, may have been ideologically conceived on a basis of racist thinking, which, consequently, will bring about the reproduction of racism within the organization of work.

In methodological terms, we used documentary research in all of Frederick Taylor’s books: *Notes on belting*, published in 1894; *A piece rate system*<sup>5</sup>, released in 1895; *Shop management*, in 1903; *On the art of cutting metals*, 1906; *Principles of scientific administration*, published in 1911; *A treatise on concrete, plain and reinforced*, from 1911; and *Concrete costs*, 1912.

<sup>2</sup>The last Census of Higher Education indicates that Brazil has 1,616 educational institutions that offer the course of business management, which leads the offer with 2,326 courses in the country (Inep, 2021).

<sup>3</sup>The results of educational policies, in the context of higher education, indicated a “turn” in the profile of students. If in the 1990s the constitution of blacks was only 0.6%, in 2005 (reflecting the first affirmative policies), it rose to 3.1% and surpassed, for the first time in history, the number of whites in 2019, with a total of 51.2% of enrollments in federal universities (National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education [Andifes], 2019). These public policies, which allow cracks in the sociocratic structures of our society, however, produce ambiguities. In the words of N. S. Souza (1983), they make it possible for the black person to occupy social places seen as elitist, but they also impose relationships in which their identity is fragmented, their pride is undermined and the solidarity among the black group is dismantled.

<sup>4</sup>The numbers referring to the total number of blacks in business management and teaching courses were generated by the authors of this article, based on the microdata available in the 2021 Census of Higher Education.

<sup>5</sup>The content of the text was also published by the American Economic Association under the title “The adjustment of wage to efficiency: three papers”, in 1896.

The choice of clipping based on this material is justified, since its ideas synthesize the presentation of articles published by Taylor in the American Society of Mechanical Engineering, in addition to composing some of his letters addressed to his correspondents at the time<sup>6</sup>. As a complement, we will use bibliographic research that analyzes the historical context of the emergence of scientific management and possible evidence of the racialization of management in Taylorist thought.

We chose Frederick Taylor as a representative of scientific business because he is considered the pioneer in the development of a business science. But also for its worldview and managerial conception, which, according to Tragtenberg (1971), fulfilled a genetic sense, whose cumulative inheritance is a conditioning factor for new theories with the persistence of their aspect.

As a theoretical contribution, we point out that the literature advanced in criticizing the ideological aspects that permeate administrative theories (Faria, 1985; Motta 1998; Ramos, 1981; Tragtenberg, 1971), as well as in the denial of enslavement and coloniality in the knowledge of these theories (Cooke, 2003; Faria, Abdalla, & Guedes, 2021; N. Jones, Novicevic, Hayek, & Humphreys, 2012; Van der Liden, 2010), notwithstanding the relationship between these two dimensions within administrative theories still presents itself as a field to be explored.

The article is structured in four parts, in addition to this introduction. In the first one, we will present the historical constitutions of the propagation of eugenics at the moment of the emergence of scientific administration; in part two, we will make a parallel between the eugenic elements present in a deeply racialized social system and Taylor's works; in part three, we will indicate the receptivity of the author's thought to the Brazilian context; in the last part, we will conclude our research with a critique of the production of scientific knowledge in the context of administration and the possible consequences for future investigations.

## THE EMERGENCY OF EUGENICS AND THE AMERICAN NATIONAL EFFICIENCY IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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The term "eugenics" also known as scientific racism, was coined in 1883 by Francis Galton and, supposedly, would be concerned with improving the innate qualities of a presumed race, considering human evolution. Galton observed that the children of economically successful people accompanied this socioeconomic condition with similar performances. He concluded, therefore, that if the poor remained poor, this was due to genetic inheritance, without taking into account the material circumstances of production and reproduction in a class society (Arcanjo & Silva, 2017; Gioppo, 1996).

Eugenic principles and guidelines, at the end of the 19th century, ended up structuring, politically and ideologically, the way in which European and North American societies perceived social relations. On this perspective, Theodore Roosevelt Junior, former president of the United States, sent, in January 1913, a letter to one of the most influential eugenicists of the time, Charles Benedict Davenport, founder of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), concerned with the issue of national efficiency for the development of the country.

Since 1890, when he became director of the biological laboratory at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, according to the *DNA from the Beginning* website, Davenport had the project of creating a research center on human evolution, a goal he achieved in 1904. Later, in 1910, with funds from a railroad tycoon, ERO was created, responsible for implementing a program to improve the race, which influenced the youth considered to be a "superior race" to make appropriate choices of spouses. This would include the State controlling, through public policy, the spread of those deemed mentally incompetent.

In Roosevelt's letter to Davenport, transcribed on the *eugenics.us* website, he manifests himself, in agreement with the biologist, regarding the fact that society could not allow the reproduction of degenerate people. Roosevelt compared a farmer's concern for the healthy reproduction of his herd to the state's necessary apprehension of the physical and moral pedigree of men and women who needed to be "the right kind."

<sup>6</sup>We also emphasize that the author's books, as they are more complete and robust publications from a scientific and philosophical point of view, are more likely to indicate his worldview of society and the consequent evidence of race in management than in publications in highly technical and specialized journals, such as the *American Society of Mechanical Engineering* (ASME), aimed at the mechanical engineering community.

On the Encicl website, it is possible to find several texts by researchers that make reference to key concepts to understand the history of eugenics and its developments in the contemporary world. In an article on pauperism, Lyster (2014) states that it was one of the conditions that worried the first eugenicists, as they considered it a condition of genetic inheritance. Over time, using several families as guinea pigs, pauperism, along with other traits considered inappropriate, such as sexual immorality and criminality, was perceived as a possible consequence of weakness or mental debility.

Another fundamental concept for understanding eugenic thinking was degeneracy, which, according to Billinger (2014, p. 1), implicitly carried the notion of a pathological moral heredity, present in social groups such as prostitutes, criminals, the poor, and the insane.:

Implicit in this notion of hereditary moral pathology was that certain social groups such as prostitutes, criminals, the poor, and the insane, were morally defective and represented a regression in human evolution. It was widely believed that these moral and physical pathologies would persist and proliferate from generation to generation whether through biological or social means, therefore, miscegenation between such morally defective individuals, particularly of other (undesirable) races, should be highly regulated (i.e., eugenics and moral hygiene) for the good of society.

The theory of progressive degeneration gains relevance with the work of Morel, in 1857, *Traits des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine*, which claimed that alcohol and other drugs caused mental weaknesses that could be passed on genetically, generating a society of inadequate individuals with inferior abilities. This theory was accepted, until the beginning of the 20th century, by several areas of knowledge, such as anthropology, biology, sociology, and criminology. Billinger (2014) states that physicians such as Henry Maudsley (1835-1918) classified degenerate behaviors as vagrancy; persistent laziness; degenerate personal hygiene; self-centeredness; self-importance; nymphomania; masturbation; licentiousness or debauchery.

In this case, miscegenation was clearly seen as a reversal of the evolutionary process, which would harm the qualitative development of North American society at the end of the 19th century, which was preparing to become a world power. Between 1892 and 1912, laws proliferated in the United States that provided for immigration and birth control for poor families, the sterilization of men and women and the prohibition of interracial marriages, since other ethnicities and races considered non-white were considered degenerate.

According to Wilson (2014), in a text on eugenic traits, the fear of the dysgenic consequences of miscegenation, that is, of damage caused by genetic inheritance, gained strength as a social movement in the United States. In at least 28 states, by 1915, laws were enacted that prohibited or annulled marriages between blacks and whites,.

In this context, in which eugenic thinking was popularized, shaping worldviews and structuring ideal models of people and citizenship, one of the first administrative theories emerged based on scientific discourse and on the purpose of dialoguing with the North American ideal of national efficiency, as we will see below.

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<sup>7</sup> Inspiration for Nazi Germany, which, in 1935, among the Nuremberg Laws, included a ban on marriages and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews (Wilson, 2014).

## POSSIBLE EUGENIC TRAITS IN THE FORMATION OF TAYLORIST THOUGHT

Frederick Wislow Taylor was born in Philadelphia in 1856, a region that was historically a pioneer in the creation of organizations aimed at the abolition of slavery in the United States<sup>8</sup>. The son of a Quaker family, abolitionist, he brought Christian conceptions in his worldview.

The abolitionist ideals of the time were a reflection of a time when the slave regime, sponsored by the southern states of the United States, had come to be considered a civilizational setback in the face of the advances that science brought in other areas of knowledge, represented by the northern states. It was believed that a modern and prosperous society should be based on rational criteria already pointed out by the various technological and scientific advances (Baptist, 2019).

This perspective, however, would not change the racialized and hierarchical conception that the North American dominant and intellectualized class launched on other regions of the globe, as evidenced, in the previous topic, with the advance of eugenic theories in a post-abolitionist period.

In his most popular work, *Principles of Scientific Management*, Taylor begins the book by quoting the words of the president (Roosevelt) who flirted with eugenic ideals for the national efficiency project:

Conserving our natural resources is only a preliminary step in the broader problem of national efficiency. Everyone immediately recognized the importance of conserving our material riches, starting a great movement that has been effective in achieving this objective. So far, however, we have only vaguely appreciated the problem (Taylor, 1995, p. 21).

In the context of demand for a national efficiency project, Taylor will develop administration centered on the maximization of tasks. To this end, he will propose the scientific selection of the worker for each of the specific functions:

We therefore carefully watched and studied these 75 men for three or four days, at the end of which time we had picked out four men who appeared to be physically able to handle pig iron at the rate of 47 tons per day. A careful study was then made of each of these men. We looked up their history as far back as practicable and thorough inquiries were made as to the character, habits, and the ambition of each of them. Finally we selected one from among the four as the most likely man to start with. He was a little Pennsylvania Dutchman (Taylor, 1995, p. 44).

It is observed, in the passage, that, when defining an accurate analysis of the subject's profile, the author emphasizes the ethnicity of the selected worker, an European, conceptualized as "the most apt to start the experiments". In the book *Shop management* (1903), Taylor will indicate the necessary items to find a worker conceived as a "well rounded" man:

The difficulty in obtaining in one man the variety of special information and the different mental and moral qualities necessary to perform all of the duties demanded of those men has been clearly summarized in the following list of the nine qualities which go to make up a well-rounded man: brains; education; special or technical knowledge, manual dexterity or strength; tact; energy; grit; honesty; judgment or common sense; and good health (Taylor, 1903, p. 45).

In these elements, it is possible to identify similarities with the perspectives of the time, which sought, in research, to elaborate and define profiles of human nature. In Taylor's case, the efforts consisted of tracing patterns based on attributes that would contribute to separating each worker according to his functions in the work environment.

<sup>8</sup>It is accepted that the principles of economic liberalism, ideological pillars of the current production system, created the idea that capitalism is synonymous with free employment, the arena of individual freedom, reason, free contractual negotiations, in which the "ideal" individual, without proper registration of class, gender, and race, without identity, is naturally enterprising, engaged, committed to his economic prosperity. Thus, capitalism and slavery would never have walked together, as they would be contradictory in themselves. One would represent progress, modernity, and the other, immobility, backwardness. However, the historical challenge posed to North American society in the post-abolition period was that the end of slavery did not mean the end of black men, women, and children, now formerly enslaved, and of everything they represented for society, bourgeoisie and the ideologues of prosperity.

In the intentionality of seeking the “ideal” workers for organizational efficiency, Taylor will define that laziness and the consumption of alcoholic beverages should be fought:

The natural laziness of men is serious, but by far the greatest evil from which both workmen and employers are suffering is the systematic soldiering which is almost universal under all of the ordinary schemes of management and which results from a careful study on the part of the workmen of what they think will promote their best interests (Taylor, 1903, p. 136).

A careful inquiry into the condition of these men developed the fact that out of the 140 workmen only two were said to be drinking men. This does not, of course, imply that many of them did not take an occasional drink. The fact is that a steady drinker would find it almost impossible to keep up with the pace which was set, so that they were practically all sober. Many, if not most of them, were saving money, and they all lived better than they had before. (Taylor, 1995, p. 60).

It is observed, in the passage, that laziness is associated with the adjective “natural”, which seems to attribute an essentialist idea of human nature. Alcohol consumption (even outside the work environment), according to the citation, should be abolished from workers’ habits. These elements approach the theory of progressive degeneration, by placing alcohol as a mental impairer that would genetically generate individuals with inferior abilities and laziness as a degenerate behavior (Billinger, 2014).

As for the abilities of individuals, Taylor seemed deterministic in defining the differences between what he considered first-class workers and “average” individuals in society:

The difference in the output of first-class and average men is as little realized by the workmen as by their employers. The first-class men know that they can do more work than the average, but they have rarely made any careful study of the matter. And the writer has over and over again found them utterly incredulous when he informed them, after close observation and study, how much they were able to do (Taylor, 1903, p. 25).

Only the first class of workers, due to their attributes, could progress, as long as they were accompanied by studies and scientific methods. Elsewhere, Taylor again cites the differences between first-class men and the rest, using the comparison between different men and horse breeds:

Suppose a contractor had in his stable a miscellaneous collection of draft animals, including small donkeys, ponies, light horses, carriage horses and fine dray horses, and a law were to be made that no animal in the stable should be allowed to do more than “a fair day’s work” for a donkey. The injustice of such a law would be apparent to everyone. The trades unions, almost without an exception, admit all of those in the trade to membership--providing they pay their dues. And the difference between the first-class men and the poor ones is quite as great as that between fine dray horses and donkeys. In the case of horses this difference is well known to every one; with men, however, it is not at all generally recognized (Taylor, 1903, p. 95).

In the previous fragment, attention is drawn to the author’s effort to detail the different species of horses (ponies, light horses, carriage horses, draft horses, and donkeys) in order to compare them with the different types of workers. Indeed, Taylor emphasizes that the difference between first-class men and poor men is as great as fine horses and donkeys.

The use of the analogy of workers with species and races of animals (a resource also used by Roosevelt to Davenport) is not limited to the aforementioned passages. In order to deal with the inherent characteristics of certain men to their functions at work and, consequently, their possible superiorities, he will associate them with cattle:

Now the one man in eight who was able to do this work was in no sense superior to the other men who were working on the gang. He merely happened to be a man of the type of the ox,--no rare specimen of humanity, difficult to find and therefore very highly prized. On the contrary, he was a man so stupid that he was unfitted to do most kinds of laboring work, even (Taylor, 1995, pp. 54-55).

As we have before stated, the pig-iron handler is not an extraordinary man difficult to find, he is merely a man more or less of the type of the ox, heavy both mentally and physically (Taylor, 1995, p. 99).



It is important to consider that these worldviews are crossed by the definition of certain worker profiles according to nationality. In the famous example used to educate the workers in his system of high-priced men, Taylor will attribute the dirty and heavy services of the factories to foreigners of Italian origin and to the “great and powerful Hungarians”. However, for the sake of speed, he will turn to an image of obstinacy rather than brute force, inspired by the fictional name Schmidt:

He was a little Pennsylvania Dutchman who had been observed to trot back home for a mile or so after his work in the evening about as fresh as he was when he came trotting down to work in the morning. We found that upon wages of \$1.15 a day he had succeeded in buying a small plot of ground, and that he was engaged in putting up the walls of a little house for himself in the morning before starting to work and at night after leaving. He also had the reputation of being exceedingly “close,” that is, of placing a very high value on a dollar. As one man whom we talked to about him said, “A penny looks about the size of a cart-wheel to him.” This man we will call Schmidt (Taylor, 1995, p. 44).

The choice of the pseudonym Schmidt, a popular name in Germany, was used to illustrate the incarnation of strength, persistence, and love for saving, referenced as cultural ideals of workers of German origin, who occupied the region of Pennsylvania, in the United States, which, according to Esch and Roedigerb (2009), represent evidence of a rhetorical and practical adjustment by Frederick Taylor with possible racial attributes in mind.

If the respective elements can approach an innatist worldview about the profiles and cultural traits of workers, would scientific management be improving the management of races inside the factories and, consequently, intensifying the exploitation of work in political minority groups?

## **POSSIBLE FORMS OF REPRODUCING RACISM IN SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT**

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In the preface to the second edition of Taylor’s *Shop Management*, republished in 1911, the former president of the Yale and Towne Manufacturing Company describes the reasons why Taylor’s theories of management acted as precursors to the management processes of the day:

As a co-worker of Dr. Taylor, in the field of industrial management, I have followed the development of his work almost from the beginning with growing admiration for the exceptional talent he brought to this new field of inquiry and with a growing realization of the fundamental importance of methods that he started. [...] The new achievement that Dr. Taylor points out that the path consists of raising human work itself to a higher plane of efficiency and earning power (Taylor, 1903, p. 5).

The respective elements indicate that Taylorist management thinking met the demands of society by establishing the economy of times and movements, perfecting a chronological logic for the context, whose assumption was based on maximizing time as a virtue.

One of the fundamental principles of Taylorism was the separation of work between those who conceive and those who execute. The planning and organization of work should be completely separate from the worker. Taylor will take a look at the workers on the shop floor who should be instructed, conditioned, led in order to be able to develop according to the norms and superior standards established by scientific management.:

Human nature is such, however, that many of the workmen, if left to themselves, would pay but little attention to their written instructions. It is necessary, therefore, to provide teachers (called functional foremen) to see that the workmen both understand and carry out these written instructions (Taylor, 1995, p. 90).

As far as possible the workmen, as well as the gang bosses and foremen, should be entirely relieved of the work of planning, and of all work which is more or less clerical in its nature. All possible brain work should be removed from the shop and centered in the planning or laying-out department, leaving for the foremen and gang bosses work strictly executive in its nature (Taylor, 1903, p. 47).

However, who will be the workers capable of conceptual skills, thinking, planning? Who will be destined only to carry out heavy work, which, consequently, will suffer the devaluation of the workforce (Braverman, 1977), due to the loss of knowledge of the productive process? And where would the Afro-descendant settlers be placed in the scientific method of the division of labor?

Dubois' studies (1899) on the black population of Philadelphia mention that the Midvale Steel company, the site of ground zero for the development of Taylorist techniques, was one of the rare places in industry where workers of African-American origin could work in large scale numbers at the turn of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Taylor integrated large-scale black workers into industry, popularly called the *nigger driver* in the region for their speed in the labor field<sup>9</sup>. However, the positions they took in scientific management were confined to certain departments within industry, far from the planning levels.

The justification for occupying low jobs and lower wages will have as a backdrop the possible innate attributes of human nature that blacks implicitly did not have:

A man with only the intelligence of an average laborer can be taught to do the most difficult and delicate work if it is repeated enough times; and his lower mental caliber renders him more fit than the mechanic to stand the monotony of repetition. It would seem to be the duty of employers, therefore, both in their own interest and in that of their employees, to see that each workman is given as far as possible the highest class of work for which his brains and physique fit him. A man, however, whose mental caliber and education do not fit him to become a good mechanic (and that grade of man is the one referred to as belonging to the "laboring class"), when he is trained to do some few especial jobs, which were formerly done by mechanics, should not expect to be paid the wages of a mechanic. He should get more than the average laborer, but less than a mechanic; thus insuring high wages to the workman, and low labor cost to the employer, and in this way making it most apparent to both that their interests are mutual (Taylor, 1903, p. 8).

It is observed, in the respective passage, that monotonous and repetitive work is seen as more bearable for individuals of "lower mental caliber"<sup>10</sup>. However, these statements, which run through several parts of his works, are based only on worldviews that try, through Taylorist observation and empiricism, to produce a management science.

The perspectives of Esch and Roedigerb (2009, p. 9) reveal that North American society was built on a racialized social system, which had to deal with Anglo-Saxon, Irish, German, Italian, Chinese, Polish, and black African workers. Racial thought formed capitalist thought at different managerial levels, much earlier than Taylorism itself, indicating possible historical links between race and management<sup>11</sup>.

In studies by Cooke (2003), N. Jones et al. (2012) and Van der Liden (2010) on management methods for plantations in the Caribbean and in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries, research points to elements that indicate the anticipation of the division of labor, the study of times and movements, which was attributed exclusively to the scientific school.

<sup>9</sup> Dubois's research (1899) registered a migratory flow of black people in the last decade of the 19th century, so that, in 1896, the city had the largest black community in the north of the country (15% of the population of the centers), surpassed, in population, just by three black communities in southern New Orleans, Washington, and Baltimore. Despite these numbers, only 7.7% of the black workforce was in the industrial sector. Baltzell (1967) will indicate that, in the Midvale Steel Company, a company in which Taylor worked between 1878 and 1896, the number of black employees was only 200 employees in 1896. In the following decade, this profile would change: in 1917, 30,000 negroes are employed in Philadelphia. At the Midvale Steel Company itself, the workforce rose to 4,000 in 1917.

<sup>10</sup> Some of Taylor's books are strictly technical, and do not have philosophical elements and/or elements about workers, as in Treatise on concrete, plain and reinforced (Taylor, 1912) and Notes on belting (Taylor, weq). Similarities are recorded in On the art of cutting metals. However, there is only one passage where Taylor (1906, p. 29) refers to the worker and emphasizes the importance of cooperation in dealing with men of "everyday" caliber: "Several men, when they cooperate with enthusiasm, even if of everyday life, can accomplish what would be almost impossible for any man, even of exceptional ability."

<sup>11</sup> For us, the separation of slavery from mainstream labor and economic history leads to impoverished accounts that assume that there was no sustained literature on labor management until the 1880s. Slave management and the "scientific" management of slaves reveals how deeply intertwined racial and managerial knowledge had already become. Though little explored, the links between race and management run deep. (Esch & Roedigerb, 2009, pp. 5-6).



Finally, Taylor's view on trade unions and how possible social and class conflicts should be managed based on scientific management is worth mentioning:

Trade union work is sacred as long as its acts are just and good, and it is condemnable as long as its acts are bad. Their rights are precisely those of non-unionized work, neither greater nor less. Boycotting, use of force or intimidation and oppression of non-union workers by unions is condemnable; these acts of tyranny are wholly un-American and will not be tolerated by the American people (Taylor, 1903, p. 191).

One of the main advantages derived from the effects of the above system is that it promotes a friendlier feeling between men and employers and thus makes unions and strikes unnecessary. [...] The need for the union, however, disappears when the men are paid, not the jobs (Taylor, 1895, p. 858).

In an analysis of this world conception about social conflicts, the social historian J. Jones (1998) will raise the question that Taylor, for hating the ethics and solidarity present on the factory floor, would have had, as one of his motivations, the idea of being a protagonist in the insertion of black workers into Philadelphia industries, at the end of the 19th century, in the hope of undermining unity within work groups.

Beyond the question, what can be inferred is that the results of scientific management, by proposing administrative harmony, place workers, men and women, as by-products of a formal and linear logic (Tragtenberg, 1971). Consequently, this ends up keeping power centered in a minority and in a society that is structured on hierarchical racial bases, preserving the status quo, intensifying, however, the exploitation of the weakest links in society, such as blacks.

## **THE RECEPTIVITY OF TAYLORIST THOUGHT IN THE SOUTH AXIS: THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT**

Frederick Taylor's thought entered Brazil in 1910, through the individual action of certain directors of Brazilian companies, who, because of their ties with industry professionals in the United States, were able to implement scientific management practices.

One of these figures was Roberto Simonsen, an engineer and businessman from São Paulo who, in 1918, spoke to the workers of his company, Companhia Construtora de Santos, about Taylor's doctrine, in addition to having built dozens of barracks, in the 1920s, in the same Taylorist model. Another renowned figure was Monteiro Lobato, who, in addition to adopting and implementing the principles of scientific management in his publishing house, also translated and disseminated the works of Henry Ford in Brazil (Ferreira, 2008).

However, the institutionalization of Taylorism in Brazil gained strength with the founding of the Institute of Rational Labor Organization (Idort), formed by an elite from São Paulo, in 1931. Based on the same pattern as the Taylor Society<sup>12</sup> in the United States, they valued the dissemination of Taylorist principles and techniques for rationalizing work and systematic management (Vizeu, 2018).

A possible common element in the profile of the protagonists of the dissemination of Taylorism was that the manifestation of interest in the great modernization projects did not seem to be dissociated from their racist positions. While Simonsen, one of those responsible for creating Idort, denied racism in the country and, at the same time, attributed race to cultural and economic factors (Maza, 2002), the writer Monteiro Lobato was an active eugenicist in historical conformations in the literary scientific field (J. W. Souza, 2017).

We highlight, in particular, Dr. Antonio C. Pacheco e Silva, first vice-president of Idort and member of the Hygiene Institute of the School of Medicine of São Paulo. His view of the world as a medical hygienist seemed to be linked to a Taylorist practice of rationalizing work based on studies of workers' health.

<sup>12</sup> Organization founded in 1912 by two business school graduates along with other engineers close to Taylor interested in management (Ferreira, 2008).

During his participation in the 1934 Constituent Assembly, he spoke publicly about the problems that ethnic mixtures, with immigration into the country, could cause:

Our experience demonstrates that the assimilation of the white races in southern Europe takes place very quickly and with many advantages. Doctor Paulo Azevedo Antunes, one of the scholars of these subjects among us, demonstrated, in exhaustive work, the superiority of the Aryan race. Based on this, when we have to choose the immigrant for our country, we must look for him within the white race and avoid at all costs the introduction of black or yellow immigrants (Anais da Bancada Paulista, 1935 as cited in Souza, 2006, p. 126 ).

This speech, according to C. A. Souza (2006)<sup>13</sup>, in addition to supporting the creation of art. 138 of the Constitution, which dealt with eugenic education in schools, indicated that the work of Idort members was not restricted to participation in civil society. In this sense, the thesis defended by Ferreira (2008) is based on the role of the institute for the creation of the Public Service Administration Department (Dasp), of the Getulio Vargas Foundation, and of the National Industrial Learning Service (Senai), in the 1940s.

As for the reasons that led to the importation of Taylorist methods in the early 1930s, despite having followed the trend of rapid adoption of systematic management in other parts of the world, they were not limited only to aspects of economic efficiency, but also to the response to the political moment of the time.

According to Vieira (1998), the end of the 1920s was marked by successive strikes and protests by blue-collar workers that paralyzed factories and threatened the status quo of the bourgeois class, such as the 70-day strike in São Paulo, which involved 70 thousand workers. The Black Movement itself gained strength institutionally during this period, as with the creation of the *Frente Negra Brasileira*, in 1931, and reached over 20,000 members, later becoming a political party.

Therefore, the Taylorist rationalization proposal by Idort was articulated in a speech that aimed to reduce social tensions, increase workers' productivity through training, generating job openings and/or employment. Moreover, the rationalization of management would make it possible to expand the hierarchy not only in tasks, but among individuals from different social classes. This would allow the company owner to distance himself from his employees, since relations in the factories would be camouflaged in a speech of objectivity, far from personal interests (C. A. Souza, 2006).

It is with the discourse of science, of rationalization as a pretext for universalist organization, that the ideology defended by the members of Idort starts to be mirrored in the articles in their magazines, which deny the conflicts of work and capital, as evidenced in issue 33 of 1934 of the institution:

The binomial that heads these lines became, a few decades ago, the commonplace that serves as a field for all maneuvers claiming extremist doctrines. Thus, the belief became widespread that they exist separately, as irreconcilable enemies<sup>14</sup>, capital and labor. However, there is no reason for such prejudice. Giving capital, which is an instrument of production like any other, an individuality, personifying it in the capitalist, is absolutely wrong. Linking to capital, the face of work, the idea of boss, lord, in relation to the worker, slave, is another mistake! (Idort, 1934 as quoted in Souza, 2006, p. 39).

It is also worth noting here that the two-thirds law, which preceded the creation of Idort by a year, may have contributed to the troubled political context of the time, thus favoring adherence to Taylorist methods. Decree No. 19,482, of December 12, 1930, by Getúlio Vargas, limited the entry into national territory of foreign passengers for work, in addition to defining the requirement of at least two-thirds of native Brazilians among the employees of the companies.

<sup>13</sup> In historical research in Idort magazines, the researcher recorded several articles from the time, from authors who defended eugenics, in order to try to explain the social problems.

<sup>14</sup> The respective citation has similarities with Taylor's philosophy, described in the following passage from the book *Concrete costs*: "It is our firm conviction that the introduction of the principles of scientific management in this field will produce the same beneficial results that have been guaranteed elsewhere: that high wages worker earnings and a low labor cost guaranteed by the employer will convince both sides that it is in each other's interest to have the welfare of the other at heart; that friendly cooperation is better than suspicious surveillance or open antagonism; that peace is better than war" (Taylor, 1912, p. 12).

Although the government's official discourse was based on solving the problem of unemployment in the country with nationalist and interventionist political measures, this act, however, was not a mere paternalistic "concession", but reflected the pressures of unions and black social movements of the time.

Thus, the reduction of competition from immigrants (which reached 80% of foreign hands employed in the service sector [Araújo, 1990]), benefited not only national workers, but blacks in particular, since the latter, since post-abolition, did not work in formal occupations, as they were subjugated by racial theories that attributed to black people an inability to perform non-coercive work and that required specialization (Araújo, 2013).

From that period, black workers gained the right to a possible participation in the formal labor market, starting to be incorporated by factories as well (Andrews, 1998)<sup>15</sup>, composing the industrial proletariat, in view of the new demand for labor.

With legitimate racial diversity inside the factories, how to prevent these subjects from relating to each other and building an identity, a feeling of belonging to a certain social class? How to train racialized and therefore naturally hierarchical workers to be efficient, productive, and competitive?

Paraphrasing Nascimento (2016) in *O genocídio do negro brasileiro*, the ancient tactic of promoting division for conquest has always been the specialty of the Brazilian white ruling class. Therefore, the Taylorist practices implemented in Philadelphia, which massively incorporated black workers into production, could serve as an inspiration for the Brazilian context, in the generation of new *nigger speeds*.

Although the respective questions are hypotheses that deserve future documentary investigations, what seems difficult to dissociate is the relationship between eugenic ideas and their Taylorist practices in Brazil, which would be adopted in the factory work environment.

We close with a passage from issue number 3, March 1932, of the *Idort* magazine, on the position of workers in organizations, which asks: where would black people be in this metaphor of the human body?

What is a factory if not a caricature of a human organism? In fact, the board is the head. The printed matter, the orders, are the nerves and determinations they transmit. The muscles are the workers, etc., form the routine organs that must perform their role as a whole, regardless of express orders from the board, just as the liver or pancreas acts in our organism (Idort, 1932, as quoted in Souza, 2006, p. 49).

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: FOR NEW INVESTIGATIONS OF RACISM IN MANAGEMENT THEORIES**

To know and interpret social phenomena, an exercise in process is required that involves the articulation of a series of mediations. There are several crossings, social marks, which constitute the subject who knows, imposing images, representations, theses, analytical categories, power relations. These images and representations that guide the production of knowledge are generally linked to the structural oppression systems of capitalism and result in production of knowledge that is not disconnected from a certain power and hegemonic speech (Collins, 2019).

The eugenic, pseudo-scientific theories of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century were fundamental in the process of dissemination and deepening of racist ideologies, formulators of a social imaginary full of assumptions of inferiority of black populations and other groups considered non-white.

In this context, with this article, we seek to reinforce the criticisms of the silencing of race in studies of organizations, presenting, as a hypothesis, that racist ideas incorporated by pseudoscience – eugenics – influenced Taylorist scientific management. In the same sense, we established the possible relationships of these racist values in the constitution of techniques that placed blacks and foreigners in a position of inferiority and exploited in the organizational environment.

<sup>15</sup> Andrews' (1998) analysis of blacks in textile companies in the state of São Paulo between 1920 and 1960 is marked by growth in the 1920s and 1940s, which almost doubled in 1950.

Theories in the field of management can and should be analyzed with the inclusion of explanations and interpretations of the world, based on the various social crossings that are experienced and shared with class, race, gender, nationality, territory, age, sexuality, theoretical practice, despite an alleged claimed neutrality (Collins, 2019; Faria et al., 2021). Thus, articulating theoretical perspectives in the scientific field, according to another social place, a place of subalternity, which opposes the western academic epistemic hegemonism, is, at the same time, fighting against the prevalent processes of validation of knowledge.

As limitations of this study, we share the thinking of Vizeu (2018), who argues that the complexity of carrying out investigations on the history of management, despite being scarce in data sources, especially in the Brazilian scenario, does not harm the work, since the restrictions of these studies lie in the status of inferences. Therefore, the conclusions are based on a non-exhaustive analysis of the events of the time, but on factual historical possibilities that require complementary efforts for a better understanding of the phenomenon.

In this sense, we point to the need to continue investigations that seek to understand the possible relations of race in the deepening of Taylorist techniques, founded in the classical school, in Henry Ford; in the formats of the theories of human schools, which maintain the separation between planning and execution, as well as in the models of current startups and “sharing economies”, which are presented as the new management theories, however, reproduce in reality, for example, the figure of black and peripheral cyclists carrying the boxes of app-companies on their backs, indicating an unprotected and exploited way of life in the bigtech market (Abilio, 2020).

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