Surveillance Education: Silence and Slavery in Pedagogical Discourse

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Abstract

Advancements in digital surveillance and its extraction capacities make it increasingly difficult to ignore the role that slavery plays in the history of pedagogy. However, many scholars tend to absent slavery's character and significance in their contextualizations. Whether this absence is interpreted as an oversight or denial, it truncates our understanding of the origins and purposes of education in society. In fact, advancements in technology have inspired more questions than answers in this area. Therefore, this conceptual survey is an attempt to reset the stage for future dialogue and research by revealing how slavery indexes pedagogy and deepens our understanding of its character and surveillance capitalism. Using Michel Foucault's theory of surveillance or panopticism, this study examines the emergence of pedagogy in Ancient Greece and how its rise anticipates fugitive pedagogy in black education. In both contexts, surveillance operates as a form of extraction, a capitalist imperative, and a technology of power that is not too distant from the thinking that underwrites chattel slavery and behaviorism. As a result, the concept surveillance pedagogy *is introduced to account for the ways in which digital surveillance and its extraction protocols rearticulate the management ethos of a plantation past for the digital future.*

Keywords: *Black education, digitalization, fugitive pedagogy, surveillance capitalism*

Introduction

Slavery is seldom recognized as a starting point in our conversations about pedagogy. However, scholars across several disciplines have suggested that it may be integral to our understanding of the future of teaching and learning, particularly as digital surveillance becomes increasingly ubiquitous in our classrooms and the workplace (Bessette 2023; Crooks 2022; Feenberg 2017; Gilliard 2017; Higdon and Butler 2025; Hyldgaard 2006; Kissinger et al. 2021; Myers 2002; Warren 2005; Wilder 2013). In fact, several thinkers have employed discourses associated with slavery and its afterlife in their studies on how advanced technology inspires divisions in learning that instrumentalize knowledge, reproduce social inequality, and command our behavior for the ends of others (Benjamin 2019; Chisnall 2020; Dennis 2024b; Farber 1970, 1998; Gillard 2017). However, locating studies in the academic literature that consider the ways that slavery indexes pedagogy is challenging for educators interested in this line of inquiry. Therefore, my goal in this conceptual survey is to try to rectify this circumstance by examining how Michel Foucault's theory of panop-

ticism can help seasoned and novice educators understand the complex relationship between slavery and pedagogy and how they are entwined by surveillance as a form of extraction, a capitalist imperative, and a technology or tool of power.

Discipline and Punish is considered the key text in which Foucault (1995) makes many of his most significant and controversial statements on the carceral nature of schools as sites of surveillance. He argues, "A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency" (1995, 176). He associates education and pedagogy with the continuous application of surveillance and other disciplinary technologies that accustom us to the operation of power through knowledge and discourse. Foucault (1981) asks, "What, after all, is an education system, other than a ritualisation of speech, a qualification and a fixing of the roles for speaking subjects, the constitution of a doctrinal group, however diffuse, a distribution and an appropriation of discourse with its powers and knowledges?" (64). The features of surveillance that Foucault locates in teaching, specifically, and education, more generally, are not too distant from those associated with racial surveillance. According to Browne (2015), "The historical formation of surveillance is not outside the historical formation of slavery" (50). Generally, the term *surveillance* is used to describe the supervision and monitoring of the activities of individuals by others who hold authority and power over them (Dennis 2024b; Giddens 1987). More specifically, Browne (2015) characterizes *racial surveillance* as a technology of power that inspires the operationalization of surveillance to reify bodies and boundaries along racial lines, inspiring and legitimating discriminatory practices against those who are negatively racialized by acts of monitoring, categorization, or differentiation (also see Benjamin 2019). In other words, race can orient and order the protocols, tools, and character of surveillance in ways that directly and indirectly reproduce inequality and asymmetrical relations of power in the classroom, workplace, and beyond (Bessette 2023; Browne 2015). Despite the continued problem of racial unrest in the United States and elsewhere, Browne (2015) indicates that slavery and its afterlife remain undertheorized areas in the history and study of surveillance—even as surveillance becomes increasingly consequential in the academic sphere (Bessette 2023; Higdon and Butler 2025; Williamson et al. 2020).

However, Bernasconi (2020) claims that Foucault makes cursory statements on race and slavery despite the fact these subjects are conceptually adjacent to key preoccupations in his work on biopower, carcerality, and surveillance (also see Baker and Heyning 2004; S. Ball 1990; Rockhill 2020; Stoler 1995). Bernasconi (2020) argues that Foucault "virtually ignored race-based slavery and the specific place of race in colonialism and imperialism," thus making his work susceptible to claims of Eurocentrism (420). On the other hand, scholars such as Ferguson (2004) invite us to (re)calibrate Foucault's work to locate those concepts that can expand our understanding of how power has underwritten the production of knowledge through surveillance, especially in education (also see Olssen 1999).

With that said, Foucault's conceptualization of the term *panopticon* provides a compelling metaphor and philosophical framework for understanding surveillance in education and society (Hope 2013). Foucault borrows the concept from Jeremy Bentham, who is noted for examining the ways in which architecture can be used to create a model prison facility as a mechanism for control. More specifically, Foucault (1995) uses the term to express how power is exercised through monitoring and observation to induce docility and utility, making humans its subject and object. In this context, the word *power* describes actions that operate according to written rules, fixed norms, or hidden techniques. One of the significant ways in which power and surveillance

are operationalized for maximum effect is through secrecy. Before the professionalization of prisons, Foucault (1995) claims that power was publicized, particularly in the form of public executions. With the professionalization of prisons, it needed to be exercised less publicly using criteria and technologies that often eluded the oversight and concernment of the larger population. This might explain why agents of power are often incentivized to find discreet ways to exercise authority and control others with impunity. For this to occur, particularly in a capitalist economy, autonomy and secrecy are imperative.

Furthermore, Foucault (1995) insists that many of the panoptic practices employed in prisons can also be evidenced in schools. In fact, one of the more inconspicuous ways in which surveillance is actualized for maximum effect in education is through varying modes of examination and writing. Hope (2013) reports that Foucault draws "attention to the importance of keeping records as part of the panoptic mechanism" (36). In clearer terms, the creation of texts through writing or inscription is enabled by surveillance as a tool for the extraction and procurement of human experiences and action. The technique of surveillance expressed through examination make it possible to transcribe reality and turn human lives into texts for the ends of others (Foucault 1995; Zuboff 1984). As such, surveillance acts as a discursive practice and regulatory force that makes individuals easier to control and manage in bondage, prisons, or schools. In Foucauldian thought, *management* is considered a form of governance that defines and orders the theoretical and practical relations of power in our daily lives (S. Ball 1990). Therefore, it is always allied to discourse or the varying modes of texts and communication that allow us to construct, relate, and regulate the representation of meaning. More important, scholars such as Hope (2013) have noted that discourse helps power to circulate and automate behavior. It is essential in both encouraging and training individuals to behave in a prescribed manner, thus reproducing acceptable ideas and behavior through self-policing. However, I value the term *surveillance textualization* to signify the panoptic dimension of all inscriptions and their effectiveness in education (Niesche 2010; Smith et al. 2013). More specifically, it helps us explain how human experiences and actions are inscribed to formulate texts, making it possible to label, categorize, and normalize individuals under the guise of teaching and learning (Foucault 1995).

Computerization and digitalization give this textualization process a momentum and agency that was once thought unimaginable. As the electronic interlink that supports the communication structure of the internet, digitalization allows human experiences and interactions to be encoded for circulation and mediation as well as diagnosis, calibration, and monetization for the ends of others (Smith et al. 2013). As a correlate of digitalization, surveillance textualism permits learning management companies such as Canvas and internet platforms such as Google to develop and operationalize algorithms to monitor, mine, and digitally code varying aspects of our experiences and treat them as raw material that can then be redeployed to control our behavior (Bessette 2023; Smith et al. 2013; Zuboff 2019). Such initiatives raise the question that this study will address: What can Foucault's theory of surveillance teach us about the relationship between slavery and pedagogy as a significant—yet undertheorized—area in education?

Purpose Statement

Using Foucauldian panopticism as a paradigm and surveillance textualism as one of its principles, I address the question above by reviewing the competing ways in which we appreciate and distinguish pedagogy in the academic literature. More important, I highlight the curious lack of commentary on the role that slavery and surveillance play in the emergence of pedagogy in

Ancient Greece. Then I reveal how slavery, as a well-established pedagogical practice in Ancient Greece, anticipates the relationship between racial chattel slavery and pedagogy in the United States, thus manifesting what Givens (2021) calls *fugitive pedagogy* in his study on black education. The term is introduced by Givens to highlight the means through which African American educators cultivated practices to combat the debilitating ways in which racial surveillance and horrific violence have been used to regulate or destroy education as a personal imperative and community reality for African Americans in the United States. To expand Givens's (2021) study, I advance the concept *surveillance pedagogy* as a discourse and starting point for contextualizing future discussions and research on the relationship between slavery, pedagogy, and the digitalization that supports surveillance capitalism. Surveillance pedagogy invites us to recognize that the extraction and textualizing processes that sustained slavery in the past are not too distant from the digitalization of the raw material or data extracted, instrumentalized, and commoditized by surveillance capitalists using today's advanced technology (Benjamin 2019; Dennis 2024b; Lauer and Lipartito 2021).

(Re)Assessing Pedagogical Discourse

In their study of pedagogy and technology in higher education, Bernauer and Tomei (2015) make no mention of a relationship between slavery and pedagogy. They note, "In more recent times, *pedagogy* has become more generally known as the art, science, and profession of teaching" (3). This appreciation of the concept appears to persist, even among those who profess to advance a more progressive and liberatory understanding of its capacities (Giroux 2005; Morris and Stommel 2018; Olson 2009; Schick and Timperley 2022; Usher and Edwards 1994). In their guide for effective teaching, Zama and Endeley (2023) provide the contextualization that is often missing in many contemporary accounts of pedagogy. They claim, "the term pedagogy originated from a combination of two Greek words[,] *paed* meaning child and *agogus* meaning leader" (13). Zama and Endeley also acknowledge that the meaning of pedagogy often changes over time (also see Beetham and Sharpe 2020; Knowles 1984). For example, teachers tend to describe pedagogy as "the study of teaching methods as well as the principles of the science of teaching" (13). However, scholars in the field of education often employ the term to characterize "the practice of learning theory and exploration of how other persons facilitate the transmission and [/] or growth of knowledge and skills onto other persons" (13). In their roles as scholars and teachers, Zama and Endeley (2023) also find that our various articulations of pedagogy tend to reflect our philosophy of education and our personal beliefs about culture, instruction, and the different ways that students learn. Learning describes the integration of knowledge as well as different skills and experiences. However, what is curious in Zama and Endeley's assessment is that they also fail to mention that pedagogues in Ancient Greece were typically, but not always, enslaved people.

In his consideration of pedagogy, Hinchliffe (2001) situates his discussion of pedagogy in the context of Ancient Greece, particularly Aristotelian thought. However, he does not elaborate on the relationship between pedagogy and slavery. Yet, other scholars have made note of the way that Aristotle often meditated on the idea of slavery, referring to slaves as the living tools of their masters (Davis 1988; Garnsey 1996). Nonetheless, Hinchliffe does not recollect this aspect of Aristotle's philosophy in his study. In some respects, Hinchliffe (2001) hints at the master/slave binary when he critiques the ways in which we struggle in our efforts to distinguish *pedagogy* and *education.* While he recognizes that the concepts are often considered complementary ways in which we transmit knowledge and skills to learners from the learned, Hinchliffe (2001) states that

this interpretation may seem more like wishful thinking for some. There are those who consider education to be an expression of teaching and learning for general inquiry and the aims and outcomes may be relatively general or open. For others, pedagogy is teaching and learning that is measurable and equips us with some specific skill or body of knowledge based on a set of standards or purposes. For Hinchliffe, one view is philosophical and contemplative and the other view is instrumental and pragmatic. Education might be considered person-centered, emphasizing character development. Pedagogy might be considered outcome-centered, emphasizing the disciplining and training required to satisfy established standards for a particular role or duty in which special skills are needed for a functional society. In this context, education focuses on the needs of the individual. On the other hand, pedagogy attends to the cultural, political, and economic role that the individual must play in a particular context or the larger society. In short, Hinchliffe (2001) concludes that there is no easy or consistent way to distinguish between pedagogy and education. He emphasizes the importance of the context in which these terms are used as possibly the best indicator of their distinctions.

In their study, Dron and Anderson (2022) highlight the ways in which advanced technology has transformed the context and conditions that shape our understanding of teaching and learning. They provide us with a definition of pedagogy that has more in common with the one presented by Bernauer and Tomei (2015) than Hinchliffe (2001). Again, one also finds that Dron and Anderson's appreciation does not include any mention or assessment of slavery in relation to pedagogy. However, they offer us a glimpse of the future of open and distance education that helps us to understand why this history is becoming increasingly significant for educators. Dron and Anderson (2022) describe what they call *emerging paradigms* in open and distance pedagogical thought. These models include *hologogy* (a cultural paradigm), *bricolagogy* (a theory-agonistic paradigm), and *data-driven* pedagogy (a theory-free paradigm).

Out of the three, the one that appears most troubling is data-driven pedagogy or the theory-free paradigm. According to Dron and Anderson (2022), this pedagogical model characterizes the ways educational data mining and learning analytics generate massive amounts of student data that can then be used to assess and influence the teaching and learning process. More significantly, the insights derived from this data can be correlated to monitor and modify teacher and student behavior in order to achieve intended learning outcomes. Essentially, this data-driven approach allows one to extract, curate, and aggregate data from learning management systems, then apply *them* in ways that can condition the teaching and learning process and outcomes. For Dron and Anderson (2022), the problem is that the pedagogical underpinnings of these practices often lack transparency. In many cases, computers and algorithms can be influenced and programmed to generate specific outputs and patterns in learning by agents that may be unknown. Yet, these theory-free pedagogical models and advanced technological tools sometimes dictate how and what students learn and who or what the source of that learning will be with limited oversight (Beetham and Sharpe 2020; Bessette 2023).

For scholars such as Zuboff (1984, 2019), these pedagogies may be data-driven, but they are not exactly *theory-free*. In some ways, they echo the sentiments of Taylorism or what is more commonly known as *scientific management* among laypeople. As its founder and leading proponent, Frederick Winslow Taylor (1998) describes his innovation as a set of principles for management designed to secure and maximize growth and prosperity for employers as well as employees. He imagines management as a science for coordinating the activities and behaviors of workers based on clearly defined methods and stipulations. One of the characteristics of Taylor's world view is that he suggests that only individuals with the proper authority and specialized training are

equipped to manage knowledge and other people (Dennis 2024a; Taylor 1998; Zuboff 1984). In this context, the agents who create the algorithms that support internet platforms and extract our personal and private data to automate and digitalize labor and learning appear to reflect the ethos that Taylor espouses in his theory of scientific management. This ethos and its paternalistic underpinnings advance Taylor's belief in the expansion of managerial authority over the domains of knowledge and work with minimal disruptions in the extraction of data and labor (Bowles and Gintis 2011; Kissinger et al. 2021; Roediger and Esch 2012; Schwab 2016; Zuboff 1984).

This ideological stance helps set the stage for what Zuboff (2019) has called *surveillance capitalism*. The term is used to describe a form of information capitalism where computerization and digitialization permit our personal and private data to be extracted, digitally transformed, and *textualized* as a by-product of the surveillance capacities that advancements in digital technology permit. In some respects, Zuboff (1984) advances aspects of Foucauldian panopticism by illustrating how digitalization instrumentalizes surveillance and manifests texts for power as well as profit. For example, surveillance capitalism is made possible by the fact that digital technology allows our experiences and data to be extracted, collected, and redeployed to command learning and condition our behavior for the profit of others. As a result of these processes, our behavior can be calibrated and oriented to increase the market share and profits of internet platforms such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook/Meta, and Amazon. Digitalization allows our data to be encoded for circulation and mediation as well as examination, normalization, and monetization. In this new mode of capitalism, our data and habits are valued more than our labor and brawn (Tau 2024; Zuboff 2019). What is even more troubling is that Zuboff (2019) claims that it is almost impossible to combat this process or refrain from participating. It automatically feeds on "our experience as we engage in the normal and necessary routines of social participation" (Zuboff 2019, 185). In essence, we have become participants in our own subjectification (discussed below). What is also alarming is that the collection, storage, and control of the massive amount of digital data extracted from our subjectification is largely proprietary, opaque, and outside the purview and control of most people and professional educators (Dron and Anderson 2022; Tau 2024; Zuboff 2019).

As a result, this concentration of knowledge and power generated by surveillance capitalism and permitted by digital technology establishes a dominance over humans and learning that Zuboff (2019) claims is *unprecedented*. In this new digital landscape, knowledge and texts are situated at the core of labor and learning and what it means to be productive in the digital age. For Zuboff, they are one and the same. She writes, "To put it simply, learning is the new form of labor" (1984, 395). When learning is no longer geographically centralized, then our old understandings of knowledge transmission and surveillance begin to resemble *out-of-school pedagogies* and practices in the community, household, and corporate workplace (Luke 2003). In this context, Zuboff (2019) promulgates ideas about learning that echo and advance many of those introduced by scholars outside education. For them, pedagogy is no longer the sole domain of academic institutions or workplace training and development programs. Technology and digitalization allow alternative learning organizations to proliferate inside and beyond traditional academic institutions in ways that align domestic policies with the prerogatives of national security and American imperialism (Kissinger et al. 2021; O'Mara 2019; Schwab 2016; Tau 2024). As a result, our metanarratives about *pedagogy* have increasingly different purposes and starting points. Usher and Edwards (1994) might agree that we continue to have competing but overlapping pedagogical discourses. One has to do with the development of one's agency, autonomy, and capacity to reason. The other may have more to do with social control, maintaining the status quo, and the reproduction of hierarchies of authority that rearticulate rather than transfigure the master/slave binary locally and

globally (Bowles and Gintis 2011; Carnoy 1974; Dennis 2019, 2020; Foucault 1995; Lemov 2005; Wilder 2013).

Fugitive Pedagogy

In one of our earliest histories of pedagogy, Compayré (1889) reports that there seemed to be little interest in studying the *obscure* beginnings of pedagogy. He describes pedagogy and its cognates in early civilizations. More specifically, he states that pedagogues were usually slaves in Ancient Greece. Many slaves were also involved in some form of agricultural, artisanship, or domestic work that required them to live and labor alongside their masters, sometimes with limited restrictions (Heuman and Burnard 2011). According to Compayré, the pedagogue in Ancient Greece was considered a guide or the conductor of a child's learning—usually a young male in a family of means. In this context, the pedagogue functioned as a chaperone or supervisor who was charged with attending to a child's needs and acquisition of skills and learning in a variety of areas. Sometimes, a well-educated slave might provide the instruction and oversee the education and development of *their* charge over a substantial period of time, particularly in Rome. Cowley and Williams (1991) claim, "Increasingly the Romans brought Greeks, either as slaves or as freedmen, into their homes and communities, in most instances to school their children but in some cases also to provide an intellectual atmosphere in which to entertain their guests" (23). In her account of pedagogy in the ancient world and beyond, Salvatori (1996) reports that the pedagogue's task was to provide oversight and guardianship over the charge even though *their* social status was generally considered low and precarious. She notes that pedagogues were typically not held in high esteem by their masters or the children placed in their charge. Salvatori also speculates that the reason slavery is often absent in our discourse on pedagogy might be related to the fact that the idea of a *slave* as a pedagogue was antithetical to the early practice of slavery in countries like the United States, where the enslaved were usually denied education. According to Salvatori (1996), the status of pedagogues acquired in ancient times eventually became monogrammed with the kind of contempt and disrepute that has not entirely disappeared in our contemporary considerations, particularly as pedagogy is later overshadowed by behaviorism and its emphasis on learning rather than teaching (also see Olson 2009).

However, Givens (2021) enriches our thinking on the origins of pedagogy and challenges our misgivings about its correlation to racial chattel slavery. This form of slavery describes the legal buying, selling, and ownership of a person for life (Davis 1988; Garnsey 1996; Heuman and Burnard 2011). Scholars consider racial chattel slavery in the United States to be different from the many variations that have pervaded world history. As a form of exploitation in which one human is owned and controlled by another, *slavery* has been a feature in different societies around the world throughout time. However, what distinguishes the character of slavery in the Americas from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth century is that the enslaved are categorized and differentiated from others by race. In the United States and other countries, slavery is one of the ways that early political and business leaders respond to labor shortages (Blackmon 2009; Heuman and Burnard 2011). A few scholars have gone as far as to consider the ways in which white servitude sets the foundation on which racial chattel slavery is established in the New World (Allen 2012; Morgan 2003; Williams 1994). Before emancipation, slavery suffuses and impacts nearly all aspects of life and commerce in the United States. Moreover, there are instances where the responsibility for teaching poor children in the South was "thrust upon white indentured servants and sometimes Negro slaves" (Atkinson and Maleska 1964, 105). Yet, slaves of African descent were

largely marginalized and excluded as full citizens and participants in society through written and unwritten regulations enforced by customs, laws, scholarship, and violence (Baptist 2014; Dennis 2020; Heuman and Burnard 2011; Warren 2005; Wilder 2013).

Givens (2021) joins other theorists and writers from several disciplines who identify the master/slave binary in racial chattel slavery as an interpretive framework for indexing and contemplating the larger socio-political, economic, and educational phenomena that explain the nature of oppression, marginalization, and exploitation in all of its current guises, iterations, and legitimations (Dennis 2024a; Fancher 2011; Farber 1970; Gates 2014; Hyldgaard 2006; Morgan 2003; Morrison 2006; Myers 2002; Wilder 2013). For example, Givens argues that, though enslaved, the pedagogue was a figure who inspired and facilitated learning, making education possible for many in Ancient Greece. Givens (2021) writes, "The enslaved also embodied unwritten lessons for the young master: they taught lessons of power to charges who wielded authority over them by virtue of their differentiated social status and bloodlines, and the former's status as property" (230). The paradoxical status of the *enslaved pedagogue* is inherently symbolic in the sense that it invites a reconsideration of the order of things and the unexplored ways in which racial chattel slavery and pedagogy are underwritten by paternalism and similar forms of surveillance as an organizing principle for social, political, and economic control (K. Ball 2022; Foucault 1995; Morrison 2006; Thompson and Tillson 2023). As a metaphor, the enslaved pedagogue is updated and crystallized by Givens's introduction of the term *fugitive pedagogy*. It is a trope that describes the subversive and transgressive practices that black people, particularly writers and educators, cultivated and enacted throughout the history of the United States to combat the disruption and criminalization of black education in the face of incessant violence and surveillance. In describing the extractive nature of chattel slavery, Givens (2021) argues, "The theft of one's mind was directly relational to, perhaps even a precaution for, the theft of one's body. For these reasons, enslaved people who could read and write were branded as 'objects of suspicion,' marked as black-fugitive-learning flesh" (12).

The exercise of power to thwart black education often overshadows the ways racial chattel slavery has contributed to the formation of education in the United States. Public education in the post-war South emerges as an outgrowth of the desire of ex-slaves to pursue the literacy and numeracy often denied to them by law and violence (Anderson 1988; Bowles and Gintis 2011). According to Wilder (2013), our ideas about American intellectual culture and education do not stand apart from slavery. He claims that the earliest American academies and institutions for learning are rooted in the slave economies of the colonial world (also see Harris et al. 2019). For Wilder, the slave trade and racial chattel slavery subsidized both college and colony. In a sense, Foucault (1995, 2010) attempts to make a similar point when he theorizes the dual character of the word *discipline*. He uses the term *discipline* to denote the management and regulation of knowledge and humans in schools as well as prisons. Labor that is forced or coerced is a form of incarceration in Foucauldian thinking. Reform schools, reeducation camps, detention centers, labor camps, and plantations are all ways that we have come to actualize discipline and punishment in the name of utility and some interpretation of education throughout history (Blackmon 2009; Foucault 1995; Warren 2005). In the United States, the expression of Foucauldian discipline can be evidenced by the effort of local governments and businesses to re-enslave blacks through the use of vagrancy laws, prison labor camps, and convict-leasing schemes (Blackmon 2009).

For many, the imprint of this legacy lives on in the carceral practices that disproportionately impact students of color in our K-12 school systems across the United States (Fancher 2011). In

her study of the school-to-prison pipeline crisis in American education, Heitzeg (2016) characterizes the ways in which carceral practices have become regular features in many school environments across the country. She uses the term *school-to-prison pipeline* to describe the policies and practices that often criminalize youth and track them out of school and toward juvenile detention centers and prisons. In many ways, this dynamic rearticulates the legacy of slavery for many black students in the educational system (Blackmon 2009; Dennis 2024a, 2024b; Fancher 2011). Heitzeg's work illuminates the dual character of many educational institutions. They function as sites of learning as well as systems of social control and oppression (Thompson and Tillson 2023). In his study of American education, Anderson (1988) argues that, to understand this history, we must recognize "that within American democracy there have been classes of oppressed people and that there have been essential relationships between popular education and the politics of oppression" (1). Whether we use the term *enslaved* or *fugitive* pedagogue, these are generative metaphors or conceptual tools that enrich our understanding of *pedagogy*. Moreover, they stimulate and challenge our thinking about the relationship between varying forms of power, knowledge, and the ubiquity of surveillance in labor and learning. Of course, surveillance and torture are animated by the chattel dimension of slavery in ways that are less evident in its antecedents in Ancient Greece (Heuman and Burnard 2011). However, it is in the ancient world that we begin to see the stage being set for the modernist preoccupation with literacy and its entanglement with ideas about slavery, rationality, colonialism, and fugitivity in the Enlightenment era (Compayré 1889; Gates 2014; Givens 2021; Heuman and Burnard 2011; Salvatori 1996).

If chattel slaves could read and write texts, particularly in the Enlightenment era, then they could also signify their humanity and challenge the academic logic and secular violence that was manufactured to predestine them to a lifetime of slavery (Anderson 1988; Gates 2014; Harris et al. 2019; Wilder 2013). In fact, Parenti (2003) describes how slave masters invented technologies of torture as well as sophisticated systems of monitoring to maintain control over slaves and discourage their educational pursuits, thus establishing one of our earliest imprints of modern everyday surveillance. Parenti (2003) claims, "Because surveillance and literacy were linked, most Southern states had, by the antebellum period, passed laws designed to keep slaves away from books" (23). With the proliferation of computers and their networking capacities, Parenti notes how digital surveillance has become even more ubiquitous than the watchful eyes of slave masters and their overseers (also see Tau 2024). According to Parenti (2003), surveillance is more than the monitoring or supervision of one's actions and activities by someone in a position to exercise authority and violence. For him, it is also a generative force that is often used to define good from bad and insiders from outsiders (Benjamin 2019; Feenberg 2017).

This assessment might explain why scholars in surveillance studies such as Browne (2015) suggest that we examine surveillance and its imprint in racial chattel slavery rather than treating it as something inaugurated by new technologies. When we follow this advice, we find more compelling evidence of the ties between slavery and the forms of extraction and textualization that advance surveillance capitalism. For example, Baptist (2014) demonstrates the ways in which violence was calibrated to extract the maximum amount of utility and docility from slaves through what is known as the *pushing system*. While he is uncertain who invented this system for increasing the production of cash crops such as cotton, Baptist claims that the concept encompasses the various surveillance strategies and torture technologies that enslavers often used to mine and extract hidden skills from their slaves. This brutal practice also includes monitoring, measuring, and documenting productivity to force enslaved people to acquire or develop the skills that would help them to push through bottlenecks, thus increasing their efficiency and shielding them from the

wrath and violence of overseers. Baptist (2014) argues that, in the pushing system, the whip was as essential as sunshine and rain when it came to making cotton grow.

In another example, Rosenthal (2018) echoes the work of Foucault (1995) and Zuboff (2019) when she describes the extraction and textualization practices that enslavers used to increase productivity and profits and expand their knowledge and power over slaves, slavery, and its economics. Enslavers would often use ledgers, journals, and reports to develop the kind of record keeping and tracking that made it easier to measure, monitor, and inscribe the behaviors and capacities of slaves for power and profit. Rosenthal (2018) reports, "Patterns of plantation labor were remarkably consistent, and these patterns fit neatly into preformatted journals and reports" (50). Without incessant surveillance and violence, the extraction and textualization of slave life and labor would be nearly impossible and a hindrance to the emergence and expansion of the forms of capitalism that set the stage for surveillance capitalism (Baptist 2014; Lauer and Lipartito 2021; Morgan 2003). According to scholars such as Rosenthal (2018), a slave's capacity to survive and perform under the threat of punishment or torture is extraordinary, especially when one considers the fact that slave life was dramatically encumbered by systems of surveillance and other technologies invented to maximize the physical and mental effects of an enslaver's ubiquitous power. She claims that technology and violence were often synonymous on plantations. The slaves recognized that the two were interconnected and escape was as dangerous as capture.

This insight might also explain why Rosenthal (2018) highlights the resemblances that she discovered between some prison facilities and plantations, which also functioned as laboratories for all kinds of experimental management practices and behavioral calibrations designed to expand the productivity of the enslaved and the education and profits of the enslaver. In fact, Rosenthal notes the musings of some thinkers who likened slavery and its management to a school for enslaved people. Though Frederick Winslow Taylor often claimed that scientific management was a new phenomenon in intellectual thought, Rosenthal (2018) argues that enslavers had been experimenting with similar principles and behavioral incentives long before him. She claims that the "language planters used to describe their efforts to improve labor productivity bears a striking resemblance to the late nineteenth-century language of scientific management" (116). According to Rosenthal (2018), in a congressional hearing, Taylor tried to distance his theory of scientific management from any association with slavery by characterizing it as a kind of *school* for workers. Moreover, as Warren (2005) notes, the claim that slavery functioned like a school or educational institution is an insight that had been promulgated by other leading thinkers (also see Wilder 2013; Willoughby 2022). More specifically, Warren introduces the perspective of controversial historians such as Ulrich Bonnell Phillips. Warren (2005) argues that Phillips identified "educational effects on both sides of the master-slave relation and traced their efficacy to pervasive southern mores, codes of conduct, and religious commitments" (45). Many contemporary historians have dismissed Phillips's assessment because of his racist world view, which invites us to consider American slavery as an extension of European imperialism and a form of benign entrepreneurship (also see Carnoy 1974; Malott 2021). Despite Phillips's contentious views on slavery, some scholars in slavery studies would agree that his claims about the interconnection between slavery and education deserve more scholarly attention (Genovese 1988; Malott 2021). Warren (2005) reports, "The master-slave relation gave impetus, contour, organization, and curriculum to an otherwise diverse institution that functioned recognizably as a kind of antebellum common school for the South" (47). However, he and many others might also agree that the legacy of slavery in American education continues to be largely overlooked and undertheorized as a foundational feature in the emergence and professionalization of teaching and learning—even as surveillance capitalism

rearticulates and advances the extraction and textualizing practices that substantiated racial chattel slavery (Anderson 1988; Dennis 2024a; Harris et al. 2019; Rosenthal 2021; Salvatori 1996; Warren 2005; Wilder 2013; Willoughby 2022).

Surveillance Pedagogy

It is possible that the relative absence of a discourse preoccupied with the foundational role that slavery plays in pedagogical thought could be an oversight or signal a lack of interest among scholars in education (Salvatori 1996; Zama and Endeley 2023). It is also possible that many sincere and well-intentioned educators find it incredibly difficult to imagine that slavery, torture, and their pedagogical dimensions might be the *bottom gears* in the history of American capitalism and education (Allen 2012; Anderson 1988; Baptist 2014; Morgan 2003; Morrison 2006; Warren 2005; Wilder 2013). In fact, some authors have suggested that schools helped to transform societies from feudalism to capitalism and slavery was essential to this disruptive transition and the emergence of our contemporary economic asymmetries (Blackmon 2009; Carnoy 1974, 2024; Genovese 1988; Wilder 2013; Williams 1994). Moreover, the management ethos and practices associated with slavery foreshadow behaviorism years before influential theorists such as Skinner (2002) imagined the far-reaching social and pedagogical implications of a *technology of behavior* powered by advanced technological systems that enabled a more complete control of human beings (Carnoy 2024; Roediger and Esch 2012). Skinner (2002) claims that a "behavioral technology comparable in power and precision to physical and biological technology is lacking, and those who do not find the very possibility ridiculous are more likely to be frightened by it than reassured" (5).

In educational philosophy, the behaviorism that Skinner (2002) hoped to advance through technology is often used to describe the use of the scientific method to observe, calibrate, and condition the actions of animals and humans to determine how to adapt and transform their patterns of behavior. For many, these studies yield insights and techniques that can be used to improve teaching and learning and develop students. Many antecedents to this perspective can be found in the writings of controversial thinkers such as John Locke, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Wilhelm Wundt, and Edward Bernays. However, educators tend to associate behaviorism with the works of Ivan Pavlov, Edward L. Thorndike, Carl Brigham, Lewis Terman, John B. Watson, and B. F. Skinner (Elias and Merriam 2005). Throughout Skinner's career, he is preoccupied with the idea of technological innovations that could monitor, analyze, and automatically enact and reinforce the kinds of behavioral changes and social management that he felt was necessary to advance humankind. In many ways, advancements in digital surveillance have made Skinner's (2002) dream a reality, as the algorithms and agents that drive our digital interactions and transform our experiences into digital texts exercise a form of power and influence over people and their social interactions and behaviors in ways that Skinner could not have fathomed (Lemov 2005; Zuboff 2019).

For example, Google has experimented with the idea of what many call the *Google Smart City*. This metaphor describes the company's effort to reimagine the public commons as a smart city, permitting the control, procurement, and monetization of nearly all aspects of human life and data through advanced technology and its largely hidden digital interconnections and extraction infrastructure. In this scenario, computerization and digitalization are operational everywhere and detectable nowhere (O'Mara 2019; Zuboff 2019). Furthermore, Google's influence is also evident in education, permeating school systems around the world. The Google Apps for Education (GAFE) program helps educators facilitate teaching and online learning opportunities for students.

While the company provides this application free of charge, Zhang (2016) reports that academic institutions usually have to register in order to access Google Classroom in GAFE. According to Zhang, "Google Classroom is like a virtual extension of a brick-and-mortar classroom" (2016, 1). As a dynamic and popular learning management system and platform, Google Classroom is designed to make teaching and learning more efficient for educators and students. It is considered an effective way to help teachers organize and manage their classroom activities and materials according to the learning styles of students. Moreover, the program provides tools that teachers can use to assess the learning of students and monitor their development. Many of the applications in Google's suite of programs can be integrated to work in tandem with others such as Gmail, Google Calendar, Google Drive, and Google Gemini (O'Mara 2019; Tau 2024; Zhang 2016).

The ubiquity of Google's power and influence in education and beyond adds significance to the evaluation made by Monahan and Torres (2010). In their study on surveillance in education, they argue that surveillance is "a dominant organizing logic of modern institutions, shaping all their operations" (6). For them, the study of surveillance in education entails more than just an examination of the monitoring and disciplining practices in schools. Surveillance is a multifaceted and multidimensional technology of power as well as a form of knowledge production. In this sense, technology is more than computerized machinery or tools. It is also a ubiquitous form of governance and supervision as a means to the ends of others (Foucault 1984; Higdon and Butler 2025; Zuboff 2019). Based on their appreciation of Foucauldian philosophy in their study, Monahan and Torres (2010) would agree that this view warrants a reconsideration of the ways in which power operationalizes surveillance and the pedagogies that we employ, particularly in the digital age. In the paragraphs below, I introduce *surveillance pedagogy*. Using a Foucauldian philosophical lens, I will outline the distinguishing characteristics of the concept and signal its behaviorist philosophical underpinnings, extraction properties, and textualization processes that can help us to register our contemporary moment.

In Foucauldian panopticism, we learn that the panopticon is an ideal prison as well as a laboratory for carrying out experiments to correct or condition human behavior for the ends of others. Foucault (1995) also claims that varying kinds of punishment strategies and techniques were calibrated and tested according to one's particular character and crime. Furthermore, he identifies the panopticon as a site for pedagogical experimentation using orphans. These experiments rely on surveillance practices and their text-making capacities. They make it possible to extract and inscribe human experiences then transform them into reports and other texts that serve as sources of knowledge and power for the management and control of others. In this sense, power acts as a prohibitive and productive force, forming an architecture of surveillance through observation and discursive practices designed to regulate the *whole social body* (Foucault 1981, 1995).

The term *surveillance pedagogy* conceptualizes what Foucauldian panopticism looks like in the age of advanced technology. More specifically, it describes a form of observation, monitoring, or watching by those positioned to exercise their authority and power in the management and supervision of various expressions of teaching and learning in formal and informal settings. The techniques and strategies used to achieve objectives in these areas and others have the potential to be appropriated and deployed in heterogeneous ways. Agents of authority can exercise power in ways that are constructive and beneficial or deleterious and exploitative. In this sense, surveillance pedagogy operates simultaneously as "a privileged form of modern knowledge production, organizational management, and social control" (Monahan and Torres 2010, 13). More important, surveillance pedagogy is constituted, operationalized, and sustained by procurement and extraction, inscription and textualization, and the seriation and differentiation of personal and private data

about an individual's experiences and actions. Insights from these human resources can be used to modify or condition individuals for public or clandestine social, political, economic, and/or academic purposes and outcomes. This feature of surveillance pedagogy explains the permeating effect of power and discourse on its character. According to Foucault's logic, regimes of power circulate and constantly evolve and overlap, reproducing themselves in similar and different ways through the interactivity and intertextuality of discourse (Dennis 2022; Foucault 2010; Monahan and Torres 2010).

In his assessment of discourse, Foucault (1981, 1984) values intertextuality as the incessant (re)formulation and (re)contextualization of texts and the discontinuous interactivity induced by power through surveillance. Its semiotic essence overlaps with the digitalization promulgated by computerization and its ability to store and transmit texts through space and time (Crooks 2022; Dennis 2022). The functionality of technology and texts and their ability to integrate and facilitate the monitoring of others are elements that distinguish surveillance pedagogy from the more traditional considerations of pedagogy discussed above. More specifically, surveillance pedagogy signals what Marx (2012) has called the *new* form of surveillance. In the field of surveillance studies, scholars often distinguish between *traditional* and *new* forms of surveillance. Traditional surveillance is limited in the sense that its character is shaped by preindustrial societies in which knowledge, information, and data remain local, compartmentalized, and disconnected. However, Marx's notion of new surveillance involves the use of advanced technology and correlating computerized devices that can monitor, extract, store, and transmit knowledge, information, and data from individuals, groups, and the different locations that they inhabit across space and time. New surveillance is nearly impossible to sustain without digitalization or the electronic links that support the internet, its platforms, and connecting devices and infrastructure (Dennis 2022; Feenberg 2017; Marx 2012).

As such, digitalization forms and sustains the networks through which power and surveillance are exercised in the extraction, curation, and transformation of our personal and private data for the ends of others. Therefore, in surveillance pedagogy, the coding and inscription of human experiences and behaviors into texts that can be stored and managed as data may be the most significant feature and protocol in its conceptualization. Everything becomes a text or sign in our interactions with digital technology (Dennis 2022; Smith et al. 2013). Foucault (1981) imagines texts as sites of struggle between those who are positioned to exercise power in certain contexts and those who are not. The digitalization of texts simply transfers this struggle into cyberspace, where the mechanisms of control favor those who own and manage the digital platforms and technological infrastructure on which advanced technology and its surveillance capacities subsist and advance. Williamson et al. (2020) and others have examined the challenges this dynamic creates in education and how surveillance pedagogy often occurs with or without the involvement of professional educators (Bessette 2023; Gillard 2017).

For example, Google and other internet platforms have discovered that school systems are a significant source of data for their initiatives (Amiel et al. 2023; Stockman and Nottingham 2022). In fact, cloud-based learning management systems such as Google Classroom can extract and collect massive amounts of data from educational systems around the world, allowing Google to influence millions of lives while advancing artificial intelligence in ways that help condition them (Tau 2024; Williamson et al. 2020). This data can be used to inform teaching and learning as well as design sophisticated algorithms and teaching robots to provide predictive-learning analytics to improve learning outcomes in schools. Some writers have pointed out that these systems can also be used to explore and monitor student behavior, particularly as it relates to self-directed

learning activities (Bessette 2023; Collier and Ross 2020; Dron and Anderson 2022). According to Williamson et al. (2020), these activities describe what they call the *datafication* of education, where the materials and pedagogical practices associated with teaching and learning are translated into various digital formats and modes of texts using computerized machines and digitalization. While they note that the surveillance protocols that operationalize these processes cannot be straightforwardly analyzed as another instantiation of surveillance capitalism, they suggest that the lines between education and its commercialization have been blurring. However, writers such as Stockman and Nottingham (2022) claim that the contemporary discourses on "digital technology in schools produce a social truth which legitimises the surveillance mechanisms and normalises surveillance capitalism" (2). Along with Williamson et al. (2020), they seem to encourage the development of conceptual tools that can help educators understand and analyze the forms, practices, and impact of digital technology and its extraction and textualizing capacities on teaching and learning inside and outside the classroom.

In her conceptualization of surveillance capitalism, Zuboff (2019) also reveals why new conceptual tools may be warranted. She claims that the power to control learning is increasingly being concentrated in the hands of surveillance capitalists—those who use surveillance technology to extract and monetize our data to control the division of learning and us. As the new masters of our diverse digital territories, surveillance capitalists can command the material infrastructure and expertise to rule the division of learning and regulate what Foucault (1981, 1995) calls the *whole social body*. Zuboff (2019) reported, "The result is that the division of learning is both the ascendant principle of social ordering in our information civilization and already a hostage to surveillance capitalism's privileged position as the dominant composer, owner, and guardian of the texts" (186). The asymmetries in power and inequality that this creates may be irreversible, as more control accrues to internet platforms and their algorithms. Zuboff (2019) concludes, "In this future, we are exiles from our own behavior, denied access to or control over knowledge derived from our experience" (327). If this is the case, then surveillance pedagogy may offer us the kind of lens that we need to recognize how those who drive surveillance capitalism and advanced technology are taking us back to a plantation past in order to manifest and control the digital future. More significantly, it offers us a novel starting point for rethinking our digital practices as expressions of discursive praxes. As such, surveillance pedagogy suggests that the key agents in the teaching and learning process now involve teachers, students, digital technology, and the surplus texts they generate for the ends of others (Beetham and Sharpe 2020; Dennis 2024b; Givens 2021; Zuboff 2019).

Conclusion

Hopefully, the conceptualization of surveillance pedagogy advanced by this study offers us the kind of discourse we need to (re)articulate our digital practices in relation to those who actualize surveillance pedagogy outside academic institutions. With that said, surveillance pedagogy can also serve as the outline of a framework for future investigations of the complex ways in which surveillance, texts, and teaching and learning intersect the academic and corporate sectors. In other words, it introduces a form of semiotic thinking in which texts or signs are simultaneously imbued with pedagogical, political, and economic values. Advanced technology integrates and translates these elements in ways many educators have yet to imagine or consequence. In fact, digital surveillance inspired by artificial intelligence and the text-making properties of language learning models such as Google Gemini, ChatGPT, and DeepSeek manifest the same inscriptions,

artifacts, and data that educators value for measuring learning and corporations value for procuring profits and advancing artificial intelligence. Under the rubric of surveillance capitalism, digital technology and its capacities have made it easier and more efficient for agents of power in education and corporations to overlap and control these processes and us.

However, this discussion reveals that these management imperatives and their extractive capacities and discursive protocols have always been with us in some form or fashion, aiding the emergence of pedagogy, racial chattel slavery, and capitalism in the West (Givens 2021; Lauer and Lipartito 2021; Malott 2021). In the past, the authority and practices of slave masters—one of our earliest prototypes for surveillance capitalists—and schoolmasters often rested on a bed of knowledge that was extracted and instrumentalized using various forms of discipline and surveillance (Anderson 1988; Morrison 2006; Warren 2005). This insight is made more poignant by the argument that "knowledge does not belong to the master but to those who must obey, i.e., the slaves" (Hyldgaard 2006, 150). In fact, interest in the surveillance, extraction, and control of our brawn has been supplanted by the raw data and texts generated by our digital footprints and social interactions. By highlighting the extractive and textualizing continuities inherent in our surveillance practices over time, this study shows how the legacy of slavery flows into the present, reflecting fundamentally—but not completely—the paradoxes and tensions operating within our academic, political, and economic systems. Historically, they have sustained the divisions between master/slave, teacher/student, capital/labor, and many others. However, these dichotomies and the asymmetrical power that they inspire are not competing conceptualizations in American society. They are parasitic interrelations that have been fundamental to its operation and sense of progress on the global stage. This study has been an attempt to demonstrate how pedagogy and its relationship to slavery are inseparable from this *symbiosis*. Awareness of this compelling interconnection and its digital rearticulation will make it more difficult for scholars and educators to ignore slavery in the discourse of pedagogical thought in the future.

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