Caring for the African American "S.E.L.F." in CPE Supervision during Two Pandemics: COVID-19 and Police Brutality

Danielle J. Buhuro and Jeremy Gilmore

"May I borrow $5.00 for lunch?" This was the question spoken by Autumn Hudson[1], a thirty-seven-year-old African American female student enrolled in the Clinical Pastoral Education Residency Program at Advocate Aurora Trinity Hospital on the south side of Chicago.

"Here you go." I (Buhuro) privately passed a $7.50 meal ticket to my resident student. At the hospital, the Charity/Advocacy department had allotted a small number of meal tickets for all hospital volunteers upon request to eat lunch at no charge in the hospital cafeteria. At my request, several tickets were donated to the Mission and Spiritual Care department for financially challenged CPE interns and residents, and Autumn was one of those students. Autumn was newly unemployed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. She had been laid off from her well-paid job as youth pastor for a prestigious church affiliated with the Baptist denomination because members had decreased their tithes and offerings during the pandemic season.

Danielle J. Buhuro is the ACPE Certified Educator for Advocate Aurora Health Care, Chicago, IL. Email: danielle.Buhuro@aah.org

Jeremy Gilmore is ACPE Certified Educator and Director of Spiritual Care Services for WakeMed Health & Hospitals, Raleigh, NC. Email: Jegilmore@wakemed.org

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This was a pivotal moment in Autumn's life. Although she had found both personal and professional fulfillment in what she experienced as the Divine calling her to parish ministry over the course of two decades, she came to her first unit of CPE discerning a new call to ministry. She was interested in social justice activism in light of recent police brutality incidents then garnering public attention via social media. She specifically felt passionately drawn to walking in a new ministerial identity as a protest chaplain, learning and merging interfaith spiritual care skills with social activism. Her first unit of clinical pastoral education (CPE) proved a wonderful moment for her to discern this new call, particularly because our program provided her with the opportunity to fulfill her clinical hours in the hospital and at a local social justice organization in Chicago. After completing her first unit, Autumn applied, interviewed, and was accepted in the residency program. But she hadn't received the first payout from her stipend and couldn't afford lunch one day during the orientation phase of our CPE program. By giving Autumn a meal ticket, I lived into my supervisory goal of caring for CPE students' social needs as well as their educational needs.

The African American S.E.L.F. Theory: a New Social Justice Education Theory in CPE Supervision

Autumn Hudson's story is like countless others I (Buhuro) have experienced in recent years of my CPE supervisory career. Many of the African American CPE students I've encountered wrestle with particular needs that affect the CPE learning process. I've categorized these needs as follows:

- Social Needs
- Emotional Needs
- Life Meaning and Purpose Needs (Existential Needs)
- Faith Needs

I coined the acronym S.E.L.F. as a mnemonic to help educators remember these four crucial aspects of African American students' learning.

I propose the African American S.E.L.F. theory as a new education theory in CPE supervision. This supervisory educational methodology is grounded in the perspective that African American social justice issues impact African American students' capacity to learn in an educational environment. Clinical pastoral education's learning objectives and outcomes focus on students primarily enhancing their pastoral identity and compe-

tency through the clinical method of learning. CPE specifically utilizes the action-reflection-action model in the learning process. I contend that systemic oppression, particularly racism, negatively affects African American CPE students' ability to solely reflect on further developing their pastoral identity and competence within the clinical setting. In other words, African American students' anxiety about matters outside the classroom impact their capacity to learn inside the classroom. In addition, Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) Certified Cducators must take into consideration that the formation of the African American pastoral identity is through the lens of racism along with a slew of other types of oppressions that African American CPE students must face, including sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism.

The S.E.L.F. theory is a social justice education (SJE) theory, a pedagogy that centers on four primary components. First, educators teach a curriculum grounded in social justice/activism and anti-oppression efforts. Second, social justice education theory points to the importance of highlighting the lived experiences and narratives of the submissive group instead of continuously highlighting the stories and experiences of the dominant group, which is the basis of critical race theory (CRT), another type of SJE theory.[2] Third, reflection on current sociological and oppressive events in society (existentialism) takes precedence in SJE theory. Lastly, social justice education theory suggests that education is grounded in dialogical mutuality—an equal or shared authority between teacher and student.[3]

Leaving Faith Behind: Attending FIRST to THE Social and Emotional Needs of African American CPE Students

In the S.E.L.F. social justice education model, the "S" represents social needs. African American CPE students must grapple with particular social needs that affect them at higher rates compared to their White CPE student counterparts. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), four types of social issues specifically affect younger African American persons more than other racial/ethnic groups:

- unemployment
- poverty
- lack of homeownership
- no access to quality medical care—inability to see a doctor[4]

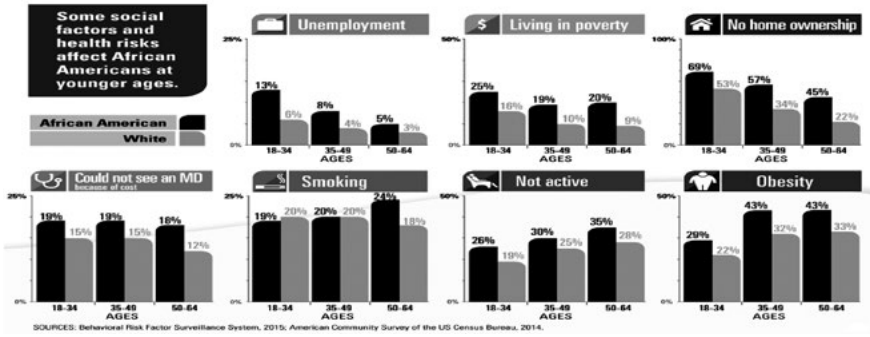

Figure 1. Percentages of African Americans and White Americans affected by social and health risks by age group, 1999–2015 ("African American Health: What You Should Know," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 2, 2017, https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aahealth/infographic.html#infographic*).*

In a domino effect, these four social issues lead to young African American persons practicing unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, inactivity, and overeating (leading to obesity).[5] These unhealthy risk factors become coping strategies that young African American persons turn to as a result of experiencing unmet social needs. The four social needs mentioned above are all related to the issue of lack of economic resources, and therefore, in some sense, young African Americans are victims of poverty who then drown their victimization in risky behaviors.

The experience of poverty, unemployment, lack of homeownership, and the inability to access medical care impacts 18 - 35 year-old African American CPE students' ability to focus and concentrate on the learning objectives and outcomes of CPE. Therefore, while it is often stated that CPE's goal is primarily to help students develop and/or enhance pastoral formation, pastoral competence, and pastoral reflection, it is difficult for younger African American CPE students to concentrate on these three objectives/outcomes if unmet social needs are also weighing heavy on their psyche. Unmet social needs impact younger African American CPE students' ability to learn. These four types of unmet social needs are also compounded by the two viruses or pandemics that African Americans students must contend with as well: COVID-19 and police brutality.

The COVID-19 pandemic has cast an ugly spotlight on the multiple health disparities that exist among African Americans. As mentioned earlier, younger African Americans experience higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment. According to the CDC:

> People with limited job options likely have less flexibility to leave jobs that may put them at a higher risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. People in these situations often cannot afford to miss work, even if they're sick, because they do not have enough money saved up for essential items like food and other important living needs.[6]

Their greater difficulty in seeing a doctor or receiving adequate healthcare in comparison to White persons also increases African Americans' risk of contracting COVID-19:

> People from some racial and ethnic minority groups are more likely to be uninsured than non-Hispanic whites. Healthcare access can also be limited for these groups by many other factors, such as lack of transportation, child care, or ability to take time off of work; communication and language barriers; cultural differences between patients and providers; and historical and current discrimination in healthcare systems. Some people from racial and ethnic minority groups may hesitate to seek care because they distrust the government and healthcare systems responsible for inequities in treatment and historical events such as the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the African American Male and sterilization without people's permission.[7]

Not owning one's home often leads to home "overcrowding," an additional risk factor in the COVID-19 pandemic. Again from the CDC:

> Some people from racial and ethnic minority groups live in crowded conditions that make it more challenging to follow prevention strategies. In some cultures, it is common for family members of many generations to live in one household. In addition, growing and disproportionate unemployment rates for some racial and ethnic minority groups during the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to greater risk of eviction and homelessness or sharing of housing.[8]

Unhealthy coping strategies in response to poverty and victimization lead African Americans to experience higher rates of chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure, diabetes, congestive heart failure, and obesity.[9] These chronic illnesses have fatal consequences for African Americans when wedded with the COVID-19 virus. Therefore, African Americans are

more likely to die after contracting COVID-19 compared to other races or ethnicities.

ACPE Certified Educators and Certified Educator Candidates can employ many different CPE supervisory interventions to demonstrate care in addressing the specific social needs of African American CPE students, especially during COVID-19. The clinical and group hours required of ACPE-accredited level I internships can be designed around the social needs of African American students. For example, offering clinical hours or group times that can be completed during the evening hours and/or weekend times can be pivotal for students who need to work full-time during weekday shifts. Offering short extended unit programs rather than short intensive unit programs helps students who can't afford to resign from their full-time employment but instead need to work full-time and at the same time complete CPE part-time.

During COVID-19, food insecurity rates are highest among poor persons of color.[10] Therefore, we encourage educators to develop CPE programming that allows African American students to fulfill clinical hours at soup kitchens and food banks. Students will not only complete CPE hours but will also fulfill personal commitments to social justice advocacy and social responsibility, all while having access to prepared meals and/or pantry supplies. For students working in a hospital ministry, educators can offer CPE tuition scholarships and paid cafeteria meal tickets for African American CPE students who lack financial affluence.

Providing online CPE programs is a wonderful benefit to CPE students who are parents caring for small children or children caring for elderly parents. These CPE students who are also caretakers can remain at home caring for vulnerable family members while, at the same time, attending group sessions via online technology such as Zoom.

After a formal application and interview process, granting CPE resident positions with stipends to qualified CPE applicants can address the poverty, unemployment, and/or lack of economic resources that these African American persons (especially younger ones) may experience. These resident positions also come with the opportunity to receive medical benefits such as health insurance, which speaks to the social need of African Americans' lack of affordable healthcare and inability to access a medical doctor. Thus, a resident position becomes more than simply an opportunity for persons to enhance their pastoral identity and competency for a future

calling in hospital chaplaincy; these stipend positions turn into a means for African Americans to experience social justice and advocacy within the larger society.

We (Buhuro and Gilmore) invite educators to offer Employee Assistance Program referrals for CPE residents. As paid employees, residents can receive therapy through this program to help address risky behaviors such as inactivity, smoking, and obesity.

African American CPE students may suffer from trauma due to continuously having to provide pastoral care to African American COVID-19-infected patients and/or surviving loved ones. Also, when medical doctors debate which patients should and should not receive limited access to ventilator treatments, African American CPE students may suffer from moral injury when called upon by medical staff to support patients chosen to receive ventilator treatments instead of African American patients. Therefore, it is important to offer African American CPE students psychological first aid.[11]

These supervisory strategies speak to meeting the ACPE objectives and level I/II outcomes of CPE programming. One of the pastoral competence objectives (O4) is "to develop students' awareness and understanding of how persons, social conditions, systems, and structures affect their lives and the lives of others and how to address effectively these issues through their ministry."[12] Gaining awareness and understanding of racism, along with other forms of oppression towards African Americans, specifically speaks to the CPE students' learning objective of "social conditions, systems and structures" (O4). A second pastoral competence objective (O6) is "to develop students' ability to make effective use of their religious/spiritual heritage, theological understanding, and knowledge of the behavioral sciences and applied clinical ethics in their pastoral care of persons and groups."[13] Helping students "make effective use of their knowledge of the behavioral sciences" speaks to CPE students' objective of learning how racism towards African Americans is grounded in the behavioral sciences, specifically sociology.

Instituting the S.E.L.F. social justice education model with African American CPE students will create a parallel process in which students will convert this supervisory educational model into a chaplain pastoral care approach in their ministry specifically to African American patients. Thus, caring for the social, emotional, life meaning, and purpose and faith needs of African Americans patients will allow African American CPE students

to fulfill a level II outcome: "L2.2—provide pastoral ministry with diverse people, taking into consideration multiple elements of cultural and ethnic differences, social conditions, systems, justice and applied clinical ethics issues without imposing one's own perspectives."[14]

In addition to social needs, African American CPE students must grapple with particular emotional needs that affect them at higher rates compared to their White CPE student counterparts (the "E" in the acronym). Not only must African American CPE students wrestle with social needs in the midst of the COVID-19 virus, but African Americans CPE students must also contend with emotional/mental health needs as a result of police brutality—another virus that's been longstanding for African Americans years before COVID-19 arrived.

At the height of the COVID-19 virus paralyzing the United States, a cell phone video went viral showing a gruesome incident of police brutality that shook America and pulled the sheets off of police brutality towards African Americans for online viewers around the globe to see. The video showed an African American male named George Floyd suffocating to death as the result of a White police officer, Derek Chauvin, pressing his knee along with the weight of his body into Floyd's neck for exactly 8 minutes and 46 seconds.[15] Floyd repeatedly cried "I can't breathe," then died shortly afterward. Floyd's fate was nothing new for African Americans. In fact, according to the website MappingPoliceViolence.org, African Americans are three times more likely to be killed by police than are White persons.

According to psychologist Monnica T. Williams, police brutality towards African Americans is a form of racism that "continues to be a daily part of American culture, and racial barriers have an overwhelming impact on the oppressed."[16] Williams goes on to suggest that

> much research has been conducted on the social, economic, and political effects of racism, but little research recognizes the psychological effects of racism on people of color (Carter, 2007). Chou, Asnaani, and Hofmann (2012) found that perceived racial discrimination was associated with increased mental disorders in African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans, suggesting that racism may in itself be a traumatic experience.[17]

Williams even highlights that racism causes PTSD in African Americans:

> One study of racial discrimination and psychopathology across three U.S. ethnic minority groups found that African Americans experienced significantly more instances of discrimination than either Asian or Hispanic Americans (Chao, Asnaani, Hofmann, 2012). Non-Hispanic Whites experience the least discrimination (11% for Whites versus 81% for Blacks; Cokley, Hall-Clark, & Hicks, 2011). Furthermore, those African Americans who experienced the most racism were significantly more likely to experience symptoms of PTSD as well.[18]

ACPE Certified Educators and Certified Educator Candidates can employ various CPE supervisory strategies to demonstrate care in addressing the specific emotional needs of African American CPE students, especially after high-profile incidents of police brutality. Consider teaching didactics on the effects of racism on mental health, social justice advocacy, and emotional self-care strategies.[19] Address the intersectionality of oppression that Black women and Black transgender persons face in light of police brutality, using resources from the #SayHerName Campaign.[20] Develop CPE programming that allows African American CPE students to fulfill clinical hours at social justice advocacy organizations. Students will not only complete their CPE hours but will also fulfill personal commitments to social justice and social responsibility.

The "L" in the S.E.L.F. social justice education model stands for Life Meaning and Purpose. After being attentive to African American CPE students' social and emotional needs, CPE educators are called to affirm and empower the existential or current life mission and calling of African American students. We encourage CPE educators to ask African American students the following reflective questions during the CPE learning process:

- What are your life meaning and purpose needs, and how do racism and other forms of oppression contribute to or conflict with those needs?
- Who are you called to be in light of racism and other forms of oppression?
- What type of pastor, chaplain, therapist, or professor are you called to be in light of racism and other forms of oppression?
- How do racism and other forms of oppression impact the ways in which you carry out your pastoral calling?
- How do you remain motivated and encouraged in ministry in light of systemic oppression?
- What does self care-look like for you, and how do you commit to actively engage in self-care in light of systemic oppression?

Lastly, the "F" in the S.E.L.F. model stands for Faith Needs. As highlighted in ACPE outcome O6, Certified Educators are called to address and care for any faith-related needs African American CPE students express during the learning process. We suggest educators ask the following types of reflective questions:

- What are your faith needs, and how do racism and other forms of oppression contribute to or conflict with those needs?
- Does your current faith or theological construct serve you in light of racism and other forms of oppression?
- If it doesn't, how can you reformulate a faith or theological construct that does serve you in light of racism and other forms of oppression?

Caring for the African American S.E.L.F. in CPE Supervision Becomes African American Communal Liberation

What makes the S.E.L.F. model pivotal is its use in a sequential fashion. Before educators seek to begin caring for and/or helping African American students further develop their pastoral identities or enhance their faith/theological constructs, educators must start with acknowledging and tending to African Americans' existential social and emotional needs. As the acronym's order highlights, African American CPE students' faith needs are last to be addressed. In essence, educators are called to leave God talk and religious and/or theological reflection behind in order to tend to social and emotional needs first.

In our field, CPE educators do not have the luxury of ignoring real-time information. Our students—chaplains on the front lines of tragedy—face ever-present realities. They cannot turn away from the trauma room gunshot victim. They cannot avoid the mother who has experienced a miscarriage. Nor can they ignore COVID-19 or police brutality. Our work is often determined by the curriculum of life. To that end, we have to be flexible and creative in our pedagogical theories and responses.

In 2020, this reality charted the educational mission of our ACPE Certified Educators and our students. We are the chairpersons for ACPE's Anti-Bias Task Force (Buhuro) and its Advocacy Committee (Gilmore). In 2020, the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, among numerous others, provided unexpected entrées into our lesson plans. Their

murders created pain and terror in our individual and collective psyches. We crafted a statement for the ACPE in early May after Ahmaud's death that denounced his killing and proclaimed our repudiation of racism.[21] Our committees began to dialogue about possible ways to support educators. Utilizing the S.E.L.F. model, we were attempting to tend to the social, emotional, life meaning, and faith needs of ACPE members. We created a list of resources, advocated for activism, and held talking sessions.

However, our response did not seem to completely meet the moment. Black Lives Matter protests were filling the news, and Black and Latinx people were dying from COVID-19 at a disproportionate rate. We were writing well-crafted statements. So, we convened to discuss how to respond as an organization. In a world that was volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, how would we chart an educational course?[22] Fueled by the writings of thinkers such as bell hooks and Paulo Freire, we decided our action would be our education.[23] From these conversations, we created "8:46," a webinar series on anti-Black racism and teaching resources for the organization. It is an eight-part series in which each webinar is 8 minutes 46 seconds long, based on the length of time the police officer held his knee on George Floyd's neck.[24]

Our newly created group was energized but needed further support. We needed partners in the work for refinement and depth. To that end, we invited the ACPE Curriculum Committee to join our work, helping ensure we were in line with curricular standards. We recruited an information technology expert to assist with the production and distribution of our resources. We noticed we needed content experts in womanist theology, Black liberation theology, and queer theology, so we sought out other educators. This collaboration was not antithetical to our work but reflected a central tenet of liberatory education—communal liberation.

The series featured topics ranging from the social construction of race to racism in healthcare to Whiteness and having an antiracist identity. The series has been a notable success. So far, although the series was posted exclusively for ACPE Certified Educators, the first six of the eight webinars have been viewed more than 1,800 times. The impact of the series is multiplied by the number of CPE students who have watched and accessed its materials.

The formation of the 8:46 webinar series has been an exercise in innovative, liberative pedagogy. Educators who desire to support their students'

growth will not only need to access these materials but may also need to create resources that do not currently exist. Parenthetically, some scholars, such as Carter G. Woodson, would argue that existing models of education founded in Whiteness are implicitly harmful for the African American student (and educator) and require interrogation.[25] The 8:46 webinar series, fueled by approaches such as S.E.L.F., helps to support the African American student, educator, and advocate.

Redefining "Reflection" in light of Racism

As stated earlier, CPE's primary focus is helping students discern their pastoral identity and enhance their pastoral competence. In addition to their social and emotional needs, African American CPE students contend with reflecting on their ministerial identity as persons of color in light of racial oppression that rears its ugly head through police brutality and health disparities. The S.E.L.F. model contends that African American students are always forced to discern their pastoral identity and competence through the lens of race and subsequently racial oppression.

As African American CPE students begin to reflect on their own life meaning and purpose along with their own faith/theological constructs in light of racism and other forms of oppression, a parallel process will occur. African American CPE students will ask these same types of questions in their pastoral care work with African American patients in the clinic. Thus, caring for the African American "S.E.L.F." in CPE supervision leads to liberation for the individual African American students and simultaneously has the potential to foster change in the broader African American community. This was noted in the response to the 8:46 webinar series, where a desire to provide individualized support resulted in communal reflection and action. We agree with ancestral and contemporary theorists that the greatest benefit of our education is the liberation of the individuals and communities in our care.

NOTES

1 "Autumn Hudson" is a pseudonym used to respect the student's confidentiality.

2 Maurianne Adams and Lee Anne Bell, eds., *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 17.

3 Works by foundational and notable social justice education theorists often cited are as follows: Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970); Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, PA: Addison-Wesley, 1979); John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1975); Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers on Group Dynamics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948).

4 "African American Health: What You Should Know," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 2, 2017, https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aahealth/infographic.html#infographic.

5 "African American Health."

6 "Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 24, 2020, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html.

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11 "Understanding Psychological First Aid," American Psychological Association, March 2019, https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/psychological-first-aid.

12 "Objectives and Outcomes for Level I/Level II CPE," ACPE, 2020, https://www.manula.com/manuals/acpe/acpe-manuals/2016/en/topic/objectives-and-outcomes-for-level-i-level-ii-cpe.

13 "Objectives and Outcomes."

14 "Objectives and Outcomes."

15 Melissa Macaya and Mike Hayes, "Floyd Was 'Non-Responsive' for Nearly 3 Minutes before Officer Took Knee Off His Neck, Complaint Says," *CNN*, May 30, 2020, www.cnn.com/us/live-news/george-floyd-protest-updates-05-28-20/h_d6de512e51a8858a57f93ffa732c2695.

16 Monnica T. Williams, "Can Racism Cause PTSD? Implications for DSM-5," *Psychology Today*, May 20, 2013, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/culturally-speaking/201305/can-racism-cause-ptsd-implications-dsm-5.

17 Williams, "Can Racism Cause PTSD?"

18 Monnica T. Williams, "The Link between Racism and PTSD," *Psychology Today*, Sept. 6, 2015, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/culturally-speaking/201509/the-link-between-racism-and-ptsd.

19 The following websites are helpful resources: www.TherapyForBlackGirls.com (Therapy for Black Girls); www.TherapyForBlackMen.org (Therapy for Black Men); www.MelaninAndMentalHealth.com (Melanin & Mental Health); www.abpsi.org (Association of Black Psychologists); www.BlackLivesMatter.com (Black Lives Matter).

20 #SayHerName Campaign, African American Policy Forum, https://aapf.org/sayhername.

21 Statement by ACPE's Advocacy Committee on the killing of African Americans, ACPE, 2020, http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?m=1102843057919&ca=030ae8db-1df1-405e-97ab-d5b48ff0f285.

22 Richard A. Slaughter and Andy Hines, eds., *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies 2020* (Washington, DC: Association of Professional Futurists, 2020).

23 bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

24 ACPE Certified Educators are encouraged to access the 8:46 webinar series through the ACPE Sharepoint site.

25 Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (New York: AMS Press, 1977).