

Ishmael Reed: Are you still in quarantine?

Michael LeNoir: No.

Ishmael Reed: When did you leave quarantine?

Michael LeNoir: After ten days. Yesterday.

Ishmael Reed: Well, how do you feel?

Michael LeNoir: Good.

Ishmael Reed: So when did you first realize that you had the virus?

Michael LeNoir: Almost two weeks ago, Wednesday.

Ishmael Reed: Was it because of a gathering?

Michael LeNoir: I think so. I mean, I went to a couple of gatherings the weekend before. The big one was the KAPA Black and White Ball, where I received an award for my work on COVID. But there were very few precautions there, and I think that's probably what happened.

Ishmael Reed: So were people wearing masks, or what happened?

Michael LeNoir: Some were wearing masks, but it wasn't as tightly controlled as most of the places I've been. None of the people at my guest table got COVID, but the people who were running the thing all got COVID.

Ishmael Reed: So what advice would you give to people? Are you saying avoid indoor gatherings, or what?

Michael LeNoir: Well, I wouldn't believe the okey-doke about any of this. I think that I wouldn't change my processes from anything that you've been doing, given the height of the pandemic. You still need to wear your mask, keep social distancing, and wear your mask indoors, if possible, because the virus is everywhere, and everybody will get this virus two or three times in their lifetime because it's going to be around that long. And we're nowhere near herd immunity. We're not testing a lot of people. We're not following up on many cases, and we're not doing any more contact tracing, and they're not going to be an attitude across the country to do any of that.

Ishmael Reed: The press reports that a lot of the COVID cases, hundreds of thousands, can be traced to people not using the vaccine. Anti-vaccine people.

Michael LeNoir: Well, they probably spread the virus much more rapidly than anybody else who tests positive. And many of them don't get tested. And many of them don't want to know whether or not they have it, but unvaccinated people may not spread the virus any more aggressively, although they probably do. But certainly, when they get the virus, they get sicker and end up in hospital or ICU more.

Ishmael Reed: So you think this one of the reasons for this spread of the virus is political?

Michael LeNoir: I think that we handled the whole situation is political. No question. I think that what happened was a certain segment of the population, instead of throwing their body over a grenade to save their comrades or trying to pick up a baby in front of a fire, used their masculinity by not wearing a mask and getting vaccinated. They see that as kind of an act of defiance and courage, but it's an act of foolishness.

Tennessee Reed: Do you think the combination of Easter, Memorial Day and graduation ceremonies have contributed to the uptick of cases?

Michael LeNoir: I'm not sure. I think that the uptick of cases was on before that. I think the relaxation of all the regulations across the country is too soon, not wearing the masks. Those kinds of things accelerated the virus.

Tennessee Reed: I went to New York City two months ago, cases were slowly beginning to rise and I was super cautious.

Michael LeNoir: Even if you're super cautious, you'll get at some point.

Tennessee Reed: What do you think of lifting mask mandates at the airport on planes or any public transportation?

Michael LeNoir: I think it's ridiculous to relax those requirements. And I think eventually you'll be able to take planes where everybody wears a mask. It may cost a little more money. I think planes are little mini spreaders now, especially in airports.

Tennessee Reed: Many flight attendants say, "I'm glad I get to wear my makeup again."

Michael LeNoir: Well, that's not why they're happy. They were pleased because of all the confrontations they had had with people on the plane and people acted crazy.

Tennessee Reed: So why do you think people won't test, even with symptoms? I had a cold at the end of January. It's still a mystery where I got it because I mask everywhere, but I went and got tested anyway and isolated myself until I got the results. And I always test when I come back from a trip. So why are people not willing to do that?

Michael LeNoir: Well, most people feel that even if you get this virus, you're just going to be sick for a few days, and you keep going on. It's estimated almost 78% of all school children have tested for this virus at one point or the other. And certainly a lot of people are not afraid of the clinical consequences of this virus. Hospitalizations and ICU beds may be up, but deaths are not compared to what has happened. Some people are lackadaisical because this Omicron variant is not as great as Delta or the original Omicron.

Ishmael Reed: Well, how do you explain the plunge in COVID cases in Africa?

Michael LeNoir: I think they can't count. There are too many resources required to count in culture and track.

Ishmael Reed: So you think that these are reports and misleading?

Michael LeNoir: Yeah.

Ishmael Reed: What does the state of Black Americans with COVID at this point? Do we have any statistics?

Michael LeNoir: Obviously, they are disproportionately impacted by more hospitalizations, ICU beds, and deaths because our community has so much hesitancy. Some of it's justified, some of it's just inaccurate information from non-trusted sources. They think something's wrong with the vaccine, and it's made a lot of African- Americans much more reluctant, although the numbers have changed.

Ishmael Reed: We had a robust Black press in the forties. Do you think the decline of the black press has something to do with that? Where in earlier times people would get the information?

Michael LeNoir: A lot of people don't read. I think most of it's word of mouth and a lot of misinformation. I don't believe the Black press substantially impacted this kind of thing.

Ishmael Reed: So you're saying you had four shots.

Michael LeNoir: Yeah.

Ishmael Reed: And so you call this a breakthrough case?

Michael LeNoir: Yeah.

Ishmael Reed: Other viruses are lurking behind these. I mean, they're more viruses to come and mutations.

Michael LeNoir: Well, there were always viruses. You look at all of the immunizations given for all those viruses: Measles, Mumps, Rubella, those are all viruses. And so we've been fighting viruses since the early 1900s. Interestingly, the State of California required these vaccines, where you stopped hearing a lot of arguments against it. A child receives fifteen vaccines before the age of two.

Ishmael Reed: What about China, where you don't choose whether you take a vaccine? Do you think that should be implemented here?

Michael LeNoir: I think mandates. I believe we need to mandate that people get the shot.

Ishmael Reed: So these democratic societies where you have a choice will probably not survive as long as the authoritarian.

Michael LeNoir: That's a nonsensical argument. You stop at stop signs; you put on seatbelts, and you don't smoke in public places. I mean, we have thousands of ethics for the public good. This is so political that it became difficult, but we got all kinds of mandates that you have to follow in this country.

Ishmael Reed: The last question. I've noticed that this Black-on-Black male crime, the CDC report says it's the leading cause of death among young Black people.

Michael LeNoir: Third leading cause.

Ishmael Reed: Third leading cause. And we also have the highest suicide rates among White males.

Michael LeNoir: No question.

Ishmael Reed: What's wrong with the American male? The White men commit suicide, and the Black men kill each other.

Michael LeNoir: I just wrote an article about this. There's always been this notion in the Black community that we didn't commit suicide, but we are more and more depressed. If you think about it, things deteriorated during the pandemic, and then you've got your adolescent mess, and then you have access to guns in other ways, and you have no mental health facilities for these kids.

Ishmael Reed: So why are White males committing suicide?

Michael LeNoir: White men are always committing suicide. Look at the numbers. They've always been high.

Ishmael Reed: Why do you think?

Michael LeNoir: I don't know. But the number of suicides has always been high. White males have been shooting themselves for a long time.

Ishmael Reed: That's it for now. Thank you very much.