

Ishmael Reed: Dr. LeNoir, why are all of these Black people getting this virus?

Dr. Michael LeNoir: I think you have to start with the concept that if you take an African American and a White person and you put them in the same environment and they both get the infection, the outcomes will apparently be the same. The only thing that changes that dynamic is an increased risk and the decreased ability to fight the virus. Let's start with increased risk. African Americans are in positions where they can't avoid contact with people who might be infected. They have the kind of jobs in services and industries that put them on the front lines. They don't get the credit as nurses and doctors because obviously their roles are important, too, but they're what I call the early bus first responders. They're the hotel maids, they're the bus drivers, they're the people who work in the grocery stores, so consequently they're exposed more. That's the first thing. Second thing, there are a lot of things that weigh down what we call your physiological systems and some things weigh down your immune systems and they're several social determinants of health. We live in more crowded spaces, often we don't have good access to health care, and then we're living in an environment of racism in America that's got to affect your immune system in some ways, so a lot of times when we think about what the responses are, we forget that there are some social determinants that impact how your body is able to respond to infections. So given the same deal that the White Americans get the outcomes would be the same, but you throw in both the requirements we have and our jobs and our compromised immune systems based on racism then consequently that explains a lot of it.

Ishmael Reed: Does that apply to Browns and Native Americans, too?

Dr. Michael LeNoir: I think all minority groups are treated differently in this country. I think there may be some unique differences. I think on Indian reservations they have less access to health care and the different ethics to seeking care and I think that Latinos live in multi-family units, so there are lots of people living in the same place, so at some point that gives them the opportunity to get the virus more quickly to more people, so I think that they're bigger problem is that more people live together so that causes a rapid spread when one person gets the virus.

Ishmael Reed: Do you think that the government is lackadaisical when it comes to solving this problem because it does come to minorities and they treat it as part of population control?

Dr. Michael LeNoir: I don't know if it necessarily has to do with population control. I think it's an issue of health equity. I don't think minority people in this country get the attention that they need for again the social determinants. They don't get good housing, they don't have good access to health care, I think there are lots of dynamics that go into the whole issue of health equity, so I don't think this country is paying attention to lots of things that have to do with minority populations. I think we have a health situation like we see with George Floyd, right? We don't have that in health, that very dramatic thing where you take a look inside Black hospitals and look around for specialists in Black neighborhoods and look for where the grocery stores are and where people are exercising and all of those things are contributing to a background which make African American more susceptible to the disease, and no, I don't think government is doing much about it. Maybe in this new climate of superficial sensitivity to the needs of African Americans as a whole to be protected in the judicial system. Maybe there will be some improvement to the health care system, but in my cynical estimation, this only temporary. A year from now all of this stuff will be forgotten and we will be right back in the same situation and the gap between the health of African... (Phone Got Disconnected).

Ishmael Reed: So Michael, here I come with my conspiracy theory. They were performing sterilization and hysterectomies on some of the immigrant women at the border, which sounds like the old sterilization eugenics stuff of the old days, so once again I'm asking whether sort of like a far right philosophy in the government operating on the basis of getting rid of the undesirable of minorities.

Dr. Michael LeNoir: I think it's more about the protection of White privilege than it necessarily is in getting rid of somebody. What happened at the border is sort of a bridge too far. I think it was just some rogue actors involved in that piece. I think they want to get rid of ethnic minorities if it helps them retain White power. That's what it's all about. When they go and ask these people about voting for Trump and they say he's not to blame for the coronavirus. What they mean is he's the only one left out there that's actively defending White privilege.

Ishmael Reed: He's been talking about how good White genes are in his recent rallies. Bringing that old stuff up.

Dr. Michael LeNoir: I'm not surprised by that. It doesn't make it true, it doesn't make it scientific. He could say that every other gene was White and that the people who support him would go for it. I mean the fact that he says it isn't different than any other. The assumption I make is that Trump is racist.

Ishmael Reed: What are Black doctors recommending that Blacks and Browns and other minorities do in order to survive? I see people in the neighborhood not wearing masks and we have workmen working on the street who are Latinx and don't wear masks.

Dr. Michael LeNoir: I think that people don't wear masks because they see it as a political statement that they want to make and other people forget their masks. We also know that African Americans shouldn't go for the okey doke. They know that this Coronavirus outbreak is not getting any better. They know it's getting worse. They know that unless we have a vaccine nothing is going to change. If you don't get a vaccine this virus is going to be looking over your shoulder for the rest of your life and you will not be able to safely go anywhere like to hear music, or athletics, or the movie theater or for lectures or for school until we have a vaccine. Maintain social distancing. Wash your hands and whenever you have symptoms go get tested. Consequently these things are what are said by the scientists. To their credit I think Black people are following these recommendations. Having looked that that party for the Supreme Court justice and another person getting the Coronavirus infection, I think that Black people are doing much more than other ethnic groups to protect themselves. As doctors we recommend the same thing that scientist recommend.

Ishmael Reed: Were you surprised when the Supreme Court justice nominee (Amy Coney Barrett) already survived COVID? They didn't say that before.

Dr. Michael LeNoir: Yeah, I was surprised because I was wondering how all these other people got infected and why she didn't. She had already been infected. When she got infected she didn't have a bad case and still had protected antibodies, so in an environment like that she probably was fairly well protected because of the fact that she's been exposed in a short distance somewhere in between then and what's going on now.

Ishmael Reed: Okay, thanks you.

Dr. Michael LeNoir: Bye bye.