

## THE VIRUS WATCH PART IV

Ishmael Reed: Michael what is the percentage of Black people in the United States who have taken the vaccine?

Michael LeNoir: I don't know the percentages today.\* I think it's probably less than ten percent. Last time I saw it was twelve percent. I really don't know and so many things have changed.

Ishmael Reed: What do you attribute that to being low?

Michael LeNoir: It's a phenomenon called hesitancy. There are a number of different dynamics that play into it. One of those dynamics really is that they all expect is Tuskegee, even though many people don't understand and that leads to a mistrust of the government as it relates to dealing with Black people and so that mistrust served as a common denominator for a lot of other issues. Quite clearly in the number of information sources that we don't know that much about that are fueling some of the theories that young African Americans have. I think what's paradoxical is that older African-Americans seem to be getting vaccinated in much higher numbers. It's those between the ages of eighteen and forty who are not. They have all kinds of theories. These theories are spread throughout the whole corpus like the vaccine itself can cause coronavirus and that we don't know that what is put in the vaccine until years later would cause you to be if not dead, pretty sick. I know two or three people have died from the vaccine and as you know, very few people have died who have been vaccinated. So quite clearly the information sources that younger Black Americans are using are very different from the ones where we are using. I'm not sure what the answer is because all the messages have been made over and over again. The case of vaccine is really pretty much out there.

Ishmael Reed: Any statistics of Black people taking the vaccines during the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918? Any statistics on hesitancy during that crisis?

Michael LeNoir: There was always hesitancy. It's discrimination because the attitude towards vaccination was very different in the public eye. Everybody wanted that vaccine and there were vaccine days and long vaccine lines so many people got vaccinated because they wanted to. But African Americans were not able to get that advantage.

Ishmael Reed: But at least they were lining up to get the vaccine, right?

Michael LeNoir: Discrimination against them prevented them from getting the same numbers as Whites for different reasons.

Ishmael Reed: Well, the point I was driving at was that we had a strong Black media, a strong Black press in 1918. A press that could educate Blacks about vaccines. We don't have that kind of thing anymore.

Michael LeNoir: I'm not sure if that's the issue. Discrimination was more hardcore. What we're seeing now is not so much the lack of messaging. It's the belief by young people that they're either invincible or that this vaccine is dangerous for them. I mean, so that's a very different philosophy.

Ishmael Reed: The University of Pennsylvania just apologized for some scientists using Black prisoners for a dermatology experiment and some of those Black prisoners will be permanently scarred.

Michael LeNoir: I'm sure that that's true. For four-hundred years we've been used.

Ishmael Reed: It doesn't just stop at Tuskegee.

Michael LeNoir: No, it's not just Tuskegee. This is a general mistrust. When they talk about critical race theory, I guess it's always talked about in terms of what Black people teach about Whites. It's also what White people teach about Blacks.

\*70% of Blacks, 63% of Hispanics and 47% of Whites approve of vaccine mandates.

Ishmael Reed: Good point. Good point. There's a Black man named Dr. John Nkengasong who's in charge of the Centers for Disease Control in Africa and he says there's going to be a catastrophe because I read that anywhere from two percent to four percent of people in the entire continent are getting the vaccine.

Michael LeNoir: Well, that true.

Ishmael Reed: He said they lost ten million people during the AIDS thing.

Michael LeNoir: Well, here's the problem. The problem is that what you worry not so much about that statistic. Because of that environment, you're going to get a bunch of variants that are resistant and much more dangerous. There's nothing you can do except provide countries with the vaccine. When I read about some aspects of Africa is that their beliefs go so much strongly against these kinds of treatments. If the countries are getting high numbers it's not for lack of having a vaccine because they got a bunch of vaccines over there that we don't even use.

Michael LeNoir: Well, the African vaccine numbers are low. South America and other places are up to thirty-five percent and they're up to eighty percent in the European countries.

Michael LeNoir: I think a lot has to do with the culture. I mean about using Western medicine and many of these countries are too poor to have much of the vaccine and the vaccines are not the most effective ones.

Ishmael Reed: Well the ones in South Africa, eighty percent of the vaccines come from India and Africans only produce one percent of the vaccines.

Michael LeNoir: We can't change that. That's the reality.

Ishmael Reed: With these Black on Black homicide rates, which are encouraged, there are no numbers available to assess the calamity that's taking place with Black people in Africa and in the United States. There must be, there must be a big hit.

Michael LeNoir: If you don't solve the problem here you really can't expect human beings to care about anybody else. It's just not human nature.

Ishmael Reed: Is that panic setting in among your colleagues among the Black doctors community? Is there a panic about this? How are you dealing with this crisis?

Michael LeNoir: Well, here's the issue. If you look at what happened with Small Pox vaccine. The Small Pox vaccine has been safe and effective for fifty years. It's the last case of Small Pox of that year. So just like the viruses live with us we have to learn to live with the virus. What's going to change the whole dynamic is eventually we will get fed up with all these excuses. Don't make any sense when some kids don't pass Math much less Science and it's going to be mandated. I don't think there's any question as far as us panicking. People are making dumb choices. I mean, those that are vaccinated seem to be well protected.

Ishmael Reed: I attended a marriage on September 19<sup>th</sup>. Those attending were among the most intelligent millennials, yet very few were wearing masks. I was shocked.

Michael LeNoir: At that age you think you know everything. You think you're invincible. That's human nature. It's that confidence that you can take care of the whole process yourself. You don't have to worry about the virus. You're strong enough. One guy said he was waiting for God to take care of it.

Ishmael Reed: So it's not just a problem with the so-called underclass or the working class, but all these people believe that they're invincible.

Michael LeNoir: I think some of them bought the Kool-Aid that this vaccine is a political issue and because of that, a lot of them are dying because of these right wing talk show hosts and Republicans governors. But the problem is the Republicans who are telling other people not to get vaccinated are vaccinated.

Ishmael Reed: And they're getting vaccinated.

Michael LeNoir: And the people at Fox news are getting vaccinated.

Okay. Well thanks for this doctor. This is great.



