

An Interview with Dr. Michael LeNoir

Women and blacks became more optimistic over time, beginning in the 1970s when gender and civil rights improved,” Graham wrote in the report. “The one group that experienced drops in optimism around the same time were less-than-college-educated white males, not coincidentally when the decline in manufacturing began.” Carol Graham and Sergio Pinto

One study “The geography of desperation in America: Labor force participation, mobility trends, place, and well-being,” says that the mortality rates for whites without college degrees has risen 30% higher than that of blacks. Yet, another study appearing in the journal Pediatrics reports that suicide rates among black teenagers are rising. We asked the distinguished pediatrician Michael LeNoir to comment.Ed.

Ishmael Reed: Why is there an increase in suicide rates among black teenagers, especially black girls?

Michael LeNoir: Well, they're under increasing pressure from institutions and their neighborhood: drugs, violence, and resources are disappearing. They have developed a sense of hopelessness.

Ishmael Reed: The study says that the suicide rate is going up among all teenage demographics, but black kids are experiencing, and it's due to neglect and abuse within the community.

Michael LeNoir: Well, that's a bit of a stretch. I think that neglect and abuse comes from institutions that are supposed to protect them. They don't have enough mental health resources.

Ishmael Reed: So you're saying that it's the institutions that are failing. You reject the idea that it's self-inflicted, and that's the institutions — the need for counseling and more resources which other groups get in schools.

Michael LeNoir: It's not schools; it's the mental health institution.

Ishmael Reed: Why is that?

Michael LeNoir: There's not enough money in the system to take care of all of these children that need help. Remember, formerly, if the teacher knew you were down, they would call your mother? Now they have so many goals the teachers have to reach, and they don't know if a kid is about to have a breakdown.

Ishmael Reed: Why isn't this happening among White kids? Even though it has gotten higher among Black kids, it reaches white kids even more. Maybe I misread this. Perhaps it was numerically in terms of numbers.

Michael LeNoir: I reject this whole article. They start with statistics, and they come up with cliché responses. I think it's the institutions that are failing our children. White kids have more than one resource. White children get more help. Black kids have less access. There's nothing new about this.

Ishmael Reed: So there are biases in these studies.

Michael LeNoir: Right. Not only is the study biased. The statistics have nothing to do with the community.

Ishmael Reed: That's a great place to end.