

# **Pandemic Racism-A True Response to the Impact on COVID-19 on Blacks/Afrikans in Chicago and Abroad**

Posted on *April 29, 2020*

By Sista Yaa Simpson, MPH, Community Epidemiologist for TACTS

(Chicago) As of April 30, 2020 in Chicago there are over 21,500 COVID-19 cases with 932 deaths, where Blacks account for nearly 40% of diagnosed cases and 54% of deaths. But what is alarming is Blacks have higher rates of death (62.0 per 100,000) from COVID-19 as compared to others (Asians-23.4, Latinos-26.4, Whites-18.1 per 100,000). Many health experts attribute these differences to underlying pre-existing chronic conditions, such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes, COPD, severe respiratory complications, and obesity. However, one main risk-factor variable that remains constant and pervasive is racism! Uché Blackstock, MD, CEO of Advancing Health Equity and Jim Harper, Democratic candidate for Congress in Indiana's 1st Congressional District both comment on racism, inequalities, and bias in the health care system.

Dr. Blackstock stated “given that racism has been institutionalized into the health care system, just as it has in practically every other system in America, racial equity tools can help to provide structure for considering the issue in COVID-19 pandemic practices, policies, programs and budgets. They can do so through identifying goals and defining measurable outcomes; engaging the community in decision-making processes; and identifying which groups will benefit or be burdened by a given decision.”<sup>^</sup> But neither commentator said plainly that racists do not give up their power. Instead, they find other ways to harm and exploit people who are not in positions of power. In other words, no one is explicitly addressing the redistribution of wealth and resources, so who is going to give theirs up? It's certainly unlikely that Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Dr. Anthony Fauci, or Blacks in positions of power would.

Racism is alive and well even though there are: Black/Afrikan ‡ elected officials, Presidents in Africa, our former Black US President, along with US Black Surgeon Generals, Black members in both houses of Congress, and in Illinois, a Black Lt. Governor, States Attorney, State Legislative Representatives, Black State and Cook County Health Directors and a recently elected, first-ever Black Woman Mayor of Chicago.

Thusly, Pandemic Racism continues, in that when other people (here and abroad) have access to mass testing, health insurance, food security, adequate housing, employment, and other economic advantages, Blacks/Afrikan Descendants continue to suffer the worst conditions from the impact of SARS V.2/ COVID-19. Similarly for Black/Afrikans, Pandemic Racism is the “virus” and deep-seated historical trauma is the “dis-ease.” As a point of clarity, all Human races are impacted by any pandemic, including Whites, who were hit first, but Blacks have been hit harder due to Pandemic Racism.

Several accounts of Pandemic Racism have been reported, such as in China where Africans are being displaced out of their homes or being denied basic living services. South Africans, Ugandans, Nigerians, and Kenyans are all coping with COVID-19 responses, including Ghanaians who receive support from Cuba, but not from the US.

Blackdoctor.org relayed the story of a woman's sister who was denied testing at a local New York hospital four times. And by the time they tested her for COVID-19 she had to be placed on a ventilator and died a few days later. This was done even in the face of passing the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, March 18, 2020, which covers all uninsured people for testing. In Illinois, the governor and Chicago mayor quickly instituted 'Shelter in Place' orders resulting in closing city departments except for such essential services as fire, police and medical needs; limited travel except for essential workers; instituted testing at the onset only for first responders and then those with symptoms followed by contact-tracking surveillance for those exposed to COVID-19.

Moreover, a new personal contact policy was announced for people to remain at least six feet apart and no gatherings of more than 10 people in one place at a time.

All the while, Blacks were being forced to stay in prisons and juvenile detention centers until an outbreak COVID-19 was detected among several inmates at the Cook County Jail. Although COVID-19 data was being released since the first case in January 24, 2020, it was not publicly displayed by race/ethnicity until April 2020, causing distrust for the accuracy of the data. How serendipitous that the first known death attributed to COVID-19 was a Black woman, whose exposed sister died as well.

Even with so many protective restrictions Blacks continue to be diagnosed and die at disproportionate rates. There continues to be no mass testing in Black community areas even where prevalence is high like the South and West sides of Chicago; No assurances in place for not 'exploiting' Blacks during routine contact tracking surveillance visits, pervasive unemployment which was already substantially higher for Blacks at 18.7% compared to Chicago's overall rate of 8.3%.^

Key social determinates/root causes have also plagued Blacks/Afrikans, such as, poor or inadequate housing, food insecurities, traumatic stress syndrome (Current and Post TSD), poverty, low income and no wealth building, dismal public safety, divestment and systemic violence. The lack of good-quality health care has triggered a widening of health inequities leading to lower life expectancy. Black people in Chicago live, on average, 6 years less (71 years old) compared to all Chicagoans overall (77 years old). \*\*

Despite Pandemic Racism, like the Phoenix Bird, and 'Still We Rise'! Pastor Anthony Williams Avalon Church, United Church of God in Christ (who first use the term Pandemic Racism), states "the world has changed, no more thinking like we used to; we are in a new era and must do things differently". Therefore, we will not just focus on the challenges, but the assets for building resiliency among our people. In Chicago, there are clusters of Black/Afrikans planning responses to COVID-19 and Pandemic Racism.

Think Tank phone conferences to work on the next iteration of the 2020 National Black Agenda are in progress with Dr. Gail Frazier (President of NBAC, National Black Agenda Consortium), Revin Fellows (NBAC Coordinator), Sista Yaa Simpson (Community Epidemiologist), TACTS and NBAC board members and others ([www.nationalblackagendaconsortium.org](http://www.nationalblackagendaconsortium.org)). The COVID-19 Black Command Center with Minster Tahama and Pastor Victoria Brady is also being convened.

Additionally, Pastor Anthony Williams has convened the Illinois Black Pandemic Citizen Task Force, which consists of NBAC board members, State legislators, and other like-minded, committed people. He states “the Citizen Task Force has no one leader, and will be righteous in right order, not catering to ‘usual suspects self-aggrandizing, hand-picked leaders or preachers just out for their tithes. In these times we must be like nature and rise by lifting each other up”! Yes, Pandemic Racism is on the rise without any signs of a cure! So, we must respond by providing more indepth analysis and ‘soul-lutions’ by Black experts for Black People. *Sista Yaa*

\*Data Source: Providers reporting to CDPH through the Illinois’ National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (I-NEDSS) [\\*\\*www.chicagohealthatlas.org](http://www.chicagohealthatlas.org)  
^<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/what-the-covid-19-pandemic-means-for-black-americans> ‡Afrikan-American represents Pan-African people throughout the diaspora inclusive of Blacks/African Americans and African Descendants

This entry was posted in *COVID-19*. Bookmark the *permalink*.

← COVID-19 Resources

## Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

Comment

Name \*

Email \*

Website