Anti-Black Racism and COVID-19 Inequities: Explaining the System, Exposing the Set-Up, and Exploring the Solutions

LaRon E. Nelson, PhD, RN, FNP, FNAP, FAAN
Associate Dean of Global Affairs & Planetary Health
Independence Foundation Associate Professor, Yale School of Nursing
Disclosure slide

I do not have a conflict of interest.
Explaining the System
Anti-Black Racism and COVID-19
Race is a social concept

- Modern humans originated in what is now known as Africa
  - Single origin
  - Features used to categorize people into a “race” is a function of movement distance from origin
- The idea of race as a scientifically valid biological taxonomy is thoroughly discredited
- Race is a social concept

RACISM IS A SOCIAL SYSTEM

- Multi-dimensional organizing logic of human power relations
- Continuously operating and does not require conscious participation
- Distributes social status benefits based on race category assignment
  - White vs Black
  - Access vs Barriers
  - Immunity vs Punishment
  - Justice vs Apathy
- High status (whiteness) can be assigned provisionally and can be revoked

Credit: Slow Factory Foundation
Exposing the Set Up
Anti-Black Racism and COVID-19
Racism is a form of structural violence because it produces socially unjust conditions that predispose Black communities to disability and death.

Overlay of Health and Social Disparities

Credit: Figure courtesy of amfAR, excerpted from Greg Millet’s July AIDS 2020 plenary.
Racial Disparities: COVID-19 Diagnoses

Racial Disparities: COVID-19 Deaths

COVID-19 Disproportionately Impacting Blacks
Exploring the Solution(s)

Anti-Black Racism and COVID-19
FIGHTING ON TWO INTERSECTING FRONTS
ENDING RACISM CANNOT BE TRIAGED TO A POST-COVID 19 PRIORITY

• Reverse inequitable structural public health and social policies that funnels vulnerability to Black communities
  • Combatting structural racism and systems of white supremacy requires active and sustained measures
  • Advocacy at local, state, federal levels and through professional organizations
  • Support those risking their lives to fight on both of these front lines

• Mitigate the material conditions that increase vulnerability to SARS-CoV-2 exposure and COVID-19 disease and death must be improved.
  • Access to technology, health insurance, secure housing, and income
FIGHTING ON TWO INTERSECTING FRONTS
ENDING RACISM CANNOT BE TRIAGED TO A POST-COVID 19 PRIORITY

• Immediately incorporate anti-racism and structural competency in health professional education curriculum and evaluation
  • medicine, nursing, public health, social work etc...
  • including residencies, fellowships and continuing education
COVID-19 and Anti-Black Racism require rapid multi-level responses aimed at its eradication and preventing its resurgence.

LESS THEORIZING.
LESS APOLOGIZING.
MORE MOBILIZING.
RACISM IS NOT A SYSTEM THAT CAN BE REFORMED

RACISM MUST BE DISMANTLED

The awakening of the moral conscience of the world is an opportunity to re-structure society to protect all human life, and the ecosystems that sustain it, against the global pandemic threats of racism and COVID-19.

Credit: “Awakening” (sculpture). Artist: Frantz Brent-Harris