

1. Baba Wekesa please provide our readers some background information about you and your research.

I'm the co-director along with my wife, Afiya Madzimoyo, of AYA Educational Institute based in Atlanta, GA. In November of this year, we'll celebrate 23 years of serving the African-American and African-Diasporan community with African-centered educational, personal and leadership development programs. We also provide research and consultations to schools, national organizations, and businesses in the areas of equity, communication, conflict resolution, youth, and adult education. My personal academic training from the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) is in three areas: intra and inter-personal communications and attitude development and change, education, and African and African American history - with a special bent toward educating and empowering Black youth and adults. My post-graduate research and work have continued in the areas of psychology, communication, Black studies, education, and Black community economic development. I'm a founding member of the Atlanta-based - Let Us Make Man - An organization of Black men dedicated to lifting Black men and the Black Community.

The impetus for this research stemmed from our Melanin Mastery class and community cohorts. This evolved from our Black Body Bio-Khemistry class where we teach biology and khemistry by following melanin throughout the body. Little did we know how fantastic a journey we'd embarked upon. We knew of melanin in our skins, but found it in our brains, eyes, ears, genitals, wrapping around our nerve cells and more. Wherever we found it, melanin was a healer, a protective energy converter, and a conductor. So, when the news of the Coronavirus hit the news, the students asked whether I thought melanin would play a healing and protective role as it does in our eyes, ears, and even in the embryo? That propelled me to investigate exactly how this virus and previous respiratory viruses in the Corona family-like SARS and MERS operated in the body.

Another impetus was my father and mother's story. They both healed themselves of cancer by building their bodies after the medical industry had given up and sent them away to die. Helping them

taught me the power of our bodies to heal with food, lifestyle, and herbs.

The media, CDC, and WHO ignores the idea that our bodies could defeat this virus. They ignore an obvious and complimentary punch for victory over this virus. Punch one is slowing transmission by social distancing and punch two (though I don't trust it) is fast-tracking lab work for a vaccine. Building our own immune systems is the third and by far the more powerful punch. It's being ignored to our peril and to support a failed medical model. That model puts primacy on attacking the germ, bacteria, virus, and ignores or minimizes building healthy bodies. The dominant response to this virus hides the failure of this model. The reason the elderly are more at risk is that those aged 65 to 69 take an average of 15 prescriptions per year, while those from 80 to 84 take an average of 18, according to the American Association of Consultant Pharmacists.

Instead of a call to strengthen our bodies, fear, isolation, and despair are being stoked with every new report. Not only does this impair the body's immune response it facilitates our accepting authoritarian changes in the social-political system to our detriment.

One more thing. History teaches us that our people - Black people - in America need to look out for ourselves. Read correctly, that same history teaches us that we have and that we can do just that. We are inspired by Dr. John Henrik Clarke who taught us to "study what we need" and to "become responsible handlers of power." Dr. Amos N. Wilson taught us to "heal alienation because we are alienated to serve aliens." The dominant media's handling of this crisis further alienates us and robs us of power. This is more dangerous than the virus itself. AYA is directed by our ancestor-teachers to help shape and inspire a Black family and community response to this crisis that is healing and empowering - physically, psychologically and socially.

2. In your research what are some of the issues related to COVID-19 that are not often discussed or focused on?

- The people who are most often dying have multiple illnesses and are on prescription drugs for various illnesses. These drugs and the patients' weakened condition put them at higher risk of dying from

COVID-19. In Italy, of all the patients who died, 30% had ischemic heart disease, 35.5% had diabetes, 20.3% had cancer, 24.5% had atrial fibrillation, 24 6.8% had dementia, and 9.6% had had a stroke. In China 25%-50% of the people who came to the hospitals with coronavirus had high blood pressure or another condition like cancer, diabetes or lung disease.

It was clear to me that a weaker immune system is one reason people with those conditions were at higher risk, but no reports or national call was issued for people to build their immune systems. Some questions began to swirl about whether high blood pressure itself was the culprit or certain drugs (ACE inhibitors) used to treat it.

- Ignored also is the role of melanin as an immune system modulator. The 2016 publication “Pharmacological Properties of Melanin and its Function in Health” has cited the following:
 - A number of previous studies have shown that both plant and synthetic melanin can modulate cytokine production and enhance several immune parameters and is antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, immunomodulatory
 - Hung et al. demonstrated that melanin extracted from different tea species induced cytokine production, with green tea melanin being at least 100 times more active than black tea melanin
 - They have also reported that antibody-secreting cells produced significantly more antibodies in animals treated with tea melanin (32–34%) than did antigen controls.
 - Melanin isolated from Echinacea and Nigella sativa seeds were shown to activate monocytes

The official recommendations to stop the transmission of the disease are isolating people and filling them with fear - creating just the kind of stress that suppresses the immune system.

Another thing that's ignored is racism. Some seem to think that because thousands of others - Asian, white, native American and

African are also affected, that racism has taken a holiday. This is a dangerous assumption.

3. What inspired you and AYA Institute to initiate COVID-19 Town Hall Meeting focused on the response for people of African Descent?

- a. The correct reading of history has taught us that we are all we've got and we're enough - enough to come through captivity, Jim Crow and continued oppression, and enough to defeat this COVID-19 virus. However, the dominant reporting lures us to surrender to Big Pharma - to wait for the fast-tracked vaccine or another drug - the white calvary.
- b. This helpless waiting on authorities and hoping against hope is the same that's asked or induced by white-supremacy domination. It invites surrender instead of empowering us to act and experience our power. Even though thousands have died from around the world, classism, racism and the system of white-supremacy hasn't gone on vacation.
- c. This surrender, hopelessness, waiting, induces fear, invites delusion, suppresses our immune systems and is dangerous beyond this immediate crisis.

4. You are encouraging people to be a part of a campaign in the Black community to combat COVID-19. What are the overall tenets of the campaign?

The campaign is called "Ngolo!" (Kikongo word meaning energy, strength, power) and there are 5 tenets:

- a. **The Calvary** - this calls for us to become proactive, self-determining, and developing a "we are the calvary" mindset. While supporting efforts to slow transmission, it calls for us to stop waiting for the vaccine or the miracle drug, and instead for us to first decide that we - as a community and a people - can and will defeat this virus by strengthening our immune systems - biologically, emotionally and spiritually. It especially calls us to

exercise, to change our eating, breathing, communicating, and recommit to our cultural mission - all to boost our immune system. This includes a 8 -12-week recommendation for us to cut out sugar and dairy as well as to move as much as we can to a plant-based diet. The emphasis is also on foods, herbs, and supplements that are high antioxidants, high anthocyanins, and are also melanin rich.

b. **Feeding our Melanin** - this calls for us to strategically go out into the sun to help activate our melanin and promote our bodies making 20,000 IUs of vitamin D3 per day. It calls for us to eat and sleep in ways that will support the activation of our melanin to super-charge our immune response. It calls for us to learn about the healing powerful chemical gift from the creator and how to use it, grow it, and protect it. Contrary to popular belief, melanin is not a “pigment;” it’s a bio-chemical polymer that changes its function based on what our bodies need. Melanin doesn’t block the sun, it eats the sun and converts that “nutrient” into energy. While known for its solar protection, it accompanies all birth, protects our ears, eyes and is key to a powerful immune response. Feeding our melanin - mentally and bio-chemically - will support other vital parts of our immune system.

c. **AYA Educare** - This calls for us to embrace the challenge to educate our own - in part or whole, and to make sure we reestablish ourselves as educational authorities in our children’s minds during these difficult times. For far too many of our youth and our people, that authority belongs to the “schools” or the state. Reestablishing ourselves doesn’t require parents to teach every subject, instead, it encourages the parent to teach what they know from cooking to fixing cars to investigating the stars, to martial arts, to the wisdom of Big Daddy and ‘nem. It calls for us to remember that they are always the “LEARNING DIRECTORS” for their children and youth.

To this end, AYA has opened some of its existing classes to

students for free and we have created free classes for parents who are thrust into the role of primary educators during this crisis. Since AYA has been teaching Black youth online for 16 years, our classes will model how we have adapted the platform and education to promote our cultural strengths and historic mission - regardless of the subject.

- d. **AECC (Authentic Emotional and Cultural Connection)** to counter the problem created by social distancing policies. To counter the ills of social distancing, we need to expand Authentic Emotional and Cultural Connection (AECC). Touch and being physically together is sooooo important for Black people. It's how we survived. Therefore we need to make extra efforts to extend our communication and strengthen family and community.

Unfortunately, historic negative socialization combined with forced isolation and forced togetherness, and dwindling resources conspire to turn our words into fire-bombs that burn us. While spitting fire at those who oppress us serves us, in this crisis, we need to turn our burning torches into healing touches.

To this end, we offer and recommend the "Blacknificent Seven" (BN7) conflict resolution and communication protocol and skills sets. BN7 consists of expanded and authentic emotional expression tools - Feelings as Messengers. Another complementary tool is The River of Touches which helps us use our words and interactions to stimulate creativity and to confront behavior without attacking the person. Our AECC tenet also includes the use of story and family storytelling to heal our broken stories and our alienation from each other and our culture. These and other elements of our Warriors, Healers and Builders toolset we are offering free to our community during this crisis.

- e. **Stay Chiseled (Tips and Resources)** is the last tenet. It calls for us to stay abreast of information about this changing crisis and to seek out information that will help us respond powerfully.

Much of this latter is already in our community - from how to grow food to healthy breathing to starting esusus (cooperative economics) to family singing to self-defense, and more. This free class brings people in the community who can share in 15 minute segments -- skills and information that support a timely response to the evolving condition of our people during this crisis and its aftermath. Don't forget the aftermath!

5. You focus heavily on proactively building up our immune system. What are some of the ways you suggest building up our immune system and why?

- a. Wani Bi Bi: Get into the strong sun! Vitamin D is a critical component of our body's immune response. Our early immune defenses consist of macrophages and monocytes. They both require Vitamin D. The sun also activates our melanin which has been shown to stimulate monocytes, cytokines, and to increase antibody production. In ancient Mali, we called the fierce sun at noon - Wani bi bi - the black sun.
- b. Get sleep - be in bed by 11:30 or earlier. Note: sleep also enhances melanin production.
- c. Drink water, water, and mo' water (at least 8 glasses per day)
- d. Cut out sugars (including soda, store-bought juices, artificial sweeteners)
- e. Cut our dairy (cheese, eggs, milk)
- f. Exercise to build the body and especially the lungs which are the targets for COVID-19. We recommend at a minimum AYA's 180 twice per day (180 equals: 25 each of pushups, situps, squats, lunges + 80 jumping jacks). If you can do more like bicycle, walk, run, burpees, planks - do that too. If you're not breathing heavily after you're done, you need to do more to push and strengthen your respiratory system
- g. Consume lots of leafy green veggies, fresh juices and copious amounts of foods or supplements to increase your uptake of vitamins C, E, K, B6, and zinc because these are key to support the first 4 lines of defense of our immune system
- h. Prioritize "allo melanin" (plant melanin) rich foods and teas, and herbs like Black garlic, black rice, saw palmetto, elderberry, green tea, echinacea, etc. They support the work of our own melanin to strengthen our immune response.

6. As we practice social distancing, what are some concerns we should be aware of regarding our mental health?

- a. Reach out wide and go deep - contact with ones that you've been meaning to or that you've forgotten. Find your cousins or classmates.
- b. Reconnect with your authentic emotions towards self and others. Communicate and act from there. Find things to authentically praise about your family and extended family. Share that praise with them.
- c. Heal from some of the emotional wounds born of past family action or oppressor action.
- d. Too often, we'll call to check on loved ones and then only fill the conversation recounting the bad news they report. Who cares what "star" was confirmed with the virus? Let's learn to put our stories first.

We recommend that you share or ask for information about family stories or lessons you've learned. Thank them for the small things they've done for you or the family. Find things/ways to praise them - authentically - that you've never got around to doing before.

- e. Pull out that family tree from the family reunion and ask about some of the people so that they come to life.
- f. Share your concerns about the virus. Be a support to them. Ask for support from them.
- g. Commit to learning more about our past and culture - a little at a time and share when you've learned something new.
- h. Join a weekly online Black book study group that operates by AYA's BN7 tools and the Nzugo Saba
- i. Recommit yourself to our people's righteous mission of returning our people to our traditional greatness - free of oppression.

7. How can people get more information about community efforts to fight COVID-19?

- a. Contact AYA Educational Institute (Wekesa or Afiya Madzimoyo)
www.ayaed.com
- b. Go to the AYA-COVID-19 Website: www.ayaed.com/covid-19
- c. Email: wekesa@gmail.com, afiya@ayaed.com or afiyao@gmail.com
- d. Call Baba Wekesa @ 404-201-2356
- e. Call Mama Afiya @ 404-532-9958