

# BLACK MUSLIM COVID COALITION

## WISDOM OF THE ELDERS: BEARING WITNESS TO OUR PAST, PRESENT & UNCERTAIN FUTURE

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Minutes by: Oumy Thioune, 2019 Deeply Rooted Fellow, Muslim Wellness Foundation

### I. Introduction

- a. BMCC is an initiative launched by the Muslim Wellness Foundation (MWF) and Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative on March 23<sup>rd</sup> to address the needs for effective planning, preparedness, and organizing in Black Muslim communities during this global pandemic.
- b. *Texas Lt. Governor: Old People Should Volunteer to Die to Save the Economy*

### II. Speakers

- a. Dr. Kameelah Rashad
  - i. Founder of Muslim Wellness Foundation
  - ii. Co-Founder Black Muslim COVID-19 Coalition
- b. Zaheer Ali
  - i. Senior Fellow & Oral Historian Pillars Fund
- c. Asha Noor
  - i. Coordinating Director for Communities United for Status & Protection
- d. Ustadh Mohumud Mohamed
  - i. Chaplain for the University of Minnesota
- e. Luqman Kenny Gamble
  - i. Philanthropist
  - ii. Music Legend "Gamble and Huff"

### III. Disparities

- a. Headlines Seen Across Medias
  - i. It's A Racial Justice Issue
  - ii. Outcry over racial data as virus slams black Americans
    1. Once this data hits national headlines, for many of us it is far too late to reserve the effects
  - iii. Chicago's coronavirus disparity: Black Chicagoans are dying at nearly 6x the rate of white residents

- iv. Black Americans face Alarming Rates of Coronavirus Infection in Some States

#### **IV. Appreciating Our Black Elders**

- a. How do we care for and include the history of our black elders while also honoring them?
- b. They are more than sick cases and incidence numbers. Our elders hold the wisdom of having lived through several other global health pandemic, wars, the civil rights movement and the Jim Crow era – Dr. Christina Harrington

#### **V. Why Now? Psychosocial Impact of Social Distancing on Older Adults**

- a. Challenges Faced by Black Elders
  - i. Physical
    - 1. At higher risk because of age
  - ii. Emotional
    - 1. Being separated from their loved ones
  - iii. Financial
    - 1. Black seniors face higher risk of poverty, even outside of COVID19
  - iv. Spiritual
    - 1. The shift to online spiritual gatherings can be difficult for seniors who gain hope from religious spaces
  - v. Technological
    - 1. A challenge to convert everything to technology
- b. Social isolation is bad for elders
  - i. Subjective isolation
    - 1. Diminished feelings of closeness to family and/or friends
  - ii. Objective isolation
    - 1. Infrequent interaction/contact with family and/or friends (i.e. living alone)
  - iii. Loneliness
    - 1. Subjective distressed feeling of being alone or separated
- c. Tips to help talk to parents about social distancing
  - i. Make sure you're the right person for this conversation
  - ii. Come from a place of love- not control
  - iii. Ask a lot of questions
  - iv. Share information from trustworthy sources
  - v. Accept that you can only control you

#### **VI. Power of Storytelling and Story Listening**

- a. "When an elder dies, it is as if an entire library has been burned down." - African Proverb

- b. The Role of Storytelling and Story-Listening As...
  - i. Historical Recovery
    - 1. The important resources people bring from the past, stories of survival
    - 2. The more stories we record, the more we extend our timeline
  - ii. Archival Creation
    - 1. Creation of documentation as we experience them
    - 2. Important because if we don't record our stories, what we will be left with in a few years looking back are *statistics and headlines*
    - 3. The stories will change as the contexts change
  - iii. Freedom Dream
    - 1. History is not a ceiling; it is a foundation. The stronger, the longer, the broader the history, the more potential we have to reach beyond it

## VII. Honoring Our Elders

- a. Honoring our elders is a fundamental part of our Islamic Tradition
- b. The primacy of the elders:
  - i. Plenty of Hadiths that provide narrations of Prophets emphasizing the importance of honoring our elders
  - ii. We are the most technologically advanced time in history, yet Black people still lives much shorter lives
  - iii. Elder fear of being put into senior living facilities by their children

## VIII. Cultural Memory

- a. Sites of cultural memory generally include
  - i. Texts/oral traditions
  - ii. Rites of passage
  - iii. Monuments/markers
  - iv. Celebration/observation

## IX. Overview Wisdom of the Elders Project

- a. Vision
  - i. This intergenerational ethnoautobiography seeks to collapse the space caused by social distancing, and to absorb radical healing through storytelling, connection, ancestral knowledge and resilience
- b. Goals
  - i. Co-power intergenerationally by regaining what has been lost through oppressive narratives that flatten the roles of our elders and their infinite wisdom
- c. Mission

- i. To disrupt the narratives that view our Elders as disposable burdens, rather than the carriers of our truths, and protectors of our legacies
  - d. Reconnecting
    - i. Bridging gaps created through conflict, migration, and displacement
    - ii. Language
      - 1. A tool for connection, and disconnection
    - iii. Broken linkage and cultural differences
      - 1. Each generation has a cultural shift
  - e. *"I am because you are- a universal connecting humanity at all levels."* -Ubuntu
  - f. Buraanbur/Jaandheer (Somali folk dance praising of the elders)

## X. Reflections and Stories from the Elders

- a. Luqman Kenny Gamble
  - i. "We are human, we are all human. The way to beat this is to keep our human tendencies and practice common sense. Be prepared, be your best to fight this....our music has to be in tune and harmonized, and that might take some time. But we are on the way, we've been through a lot. This is Allah's world, and as long as you stick to take and keep asking Allah for forgiveness and push our children as a community, we will be fine."

## XI. What Does This All Mean for Black Muslims

- a. Instilling pride and resilience
- b. Deepen our connection
- c. Promote collective healing

## XII. Q&A

- a. It is important as we embark on this work, to understand how we are present in this experience
- b. Listening does bridge distance, but we also have to maintain distance from these vulnerable communities, through the combination of technological advances.
  - i. We have to figure out how we LISTEN.

## XIII. Conclusion

### a. Next Steps

- i. Offering Guidance
  - 1. Be curious about the treasure in your midst
- ii. Join BMCC
  - 1. Follow us on our social media platforms
- iii. STAY HOME!
- iv. "If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; if the plague breaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place."- Sahih Al-Bukhari

