



Dr. Krystal Redman

November 16, 2024

Interviewed by Ashby Combahee and Dartricia Rollins

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/georgiadusk/justice-now-2024-dr-krystal>

Citation: Redman, Dr. Krystal. "SPARK JusticeNOW2024: Dr. Krystal Redman." Interviewed by Ashby Combahee & Dartricia Rollins. 16 November 2024, Georgia Dusk: a southern liberation oral history, georgiadusk.com.

Dartricia Rollins 00:00

Hi. My name is Dartricia Rollins, and I'm here with Ashby Combahee, and we're interviewing Dr. Krystal Redman for the We Tell Our Stories: reproductive justice oral histories. Event today is November 16, 2024 and Georgia Dusk, a southern liberation oral history project is conducting this oral history at Loudermilk Conference Center in downtown Atlanta as part of Justice Now 2024, a cross movement, power building and power shifting national conference. You've been asked to participate in this oral history as part of the documentation of the long history of resistance, struggle in organizing in Georgia and across the US South, Spark reproductive justice now is one of the central organizations within its legacy of community networks, organizing strategies and resources for healing and response to constant state repression. The oral history interviews provide elements of history that are often not apparent in traditional archival documents or dominant media. The interviews enable participants to reclaim the narrative and historical representation of reproductive justice organizing and movement building.

Dartricia Rollins 01:13

Dr Redman, can you please introduce yourself by saying your name pronouns and organizing or cultural work you do

Dr. KR 01:22

Thank you for having me. So I'm KR, I- they/she pronouns. And I think the work that, or the journey that's got me here in this work and movement space, is really thinking back at my political lineage and being rooted in Los Angeles, California. I come from a family of organizers. Come from a family of Black Panther leaders, as well as for those that are in LA, you know that they are the gangs of LA. And

I think when people think about gangs, they think of like, you know, violence and harm and things of that nature. But the gangs that I grew up around were rooted out of the Black Panther movement and were created specifically this particular gang, the Crips, were created to protect the black family, against the LAPD and against other structural institutions that really were created to harm black folks. And so I grew up around organizers, cultural organizers, people that literally fought, physically fought, to get the space to just like, go into school, like, you know, to receive like this formalized, structured education, or to have like, safer places, to just like, sit in, you know, move around in our communities and such. And actually, to own a home or rent a home or whatnot, like literally had to fight for those things and just to be safe. So growing up in a community where there was like, a protective veil of how we love black folks, how we create spaces for us that were not traditionally designed for us to be in and were not created for us, was my upbringing.

Dr. KR 03:05

And I also grew up in a time where it was like, in order to find safety and obtain tangible resources, like, you know, funds and you know, you have to have a stable job. And in order to do that, you would need to either be, like, a doctor or a lawyer. That's what I was told. Like, alright, if you want to come up out of this hood, you're going to need to be a doctor and lawyer. And I think we need to unpack that too as well. Like, why don't need to come up out of this hood? Like, what, like, what are the structures that exist in the institutional injustices that exist that put us in a place where, like, we don't have, like, equitable housing, and we live in food deserts and transportation is shitty and all these different things. And then we say, "oh, that's the hood" because, you know, and then eventually it's gentrified, and we're pushed out, and now it's something else, right? And I'm seeing that all over LA, even though I'm that's, you know, not where I live now, and such, but I'm seeing it across from LA to Atlanta and such. But I was told that in order to, like, take care of your family, take care of your community, you have to, like, go to school and like, get these letters behind your name so you can make a living, have stable income, and like, take care of your family and and go beyond kind of like survival. So, like, that was my path, like you to become a doctor, lawyer, you know, and such. And that was, like, drilled in us, in community. And eventually, you know, I took heed to that was like, alright, not only was it this idea of, like, how do I broaden and strengthen the movement for like, protecting and loving in like, for my family and community and such. But also, what do I do with that when I like, enter into these institutions, knowing that I come from this lineage of movement folks and folks that fuck things up. So what does that look like for me to be, you know, in an institution like educational system and trying to, like, get these letters or whatever, and what to adapt to, like, white supremacy? Is that like, is that the thought there. So I think, you know, as I kind of navigated through school-

Dr. KR 05:12

and I'll also name that was also survival for me. School gave me housing. You know, it allowed me to- Because I had a period of time where, I was houseless from 15 to 18, just trying to figure out, like, literally living on the streets and trying to also raise my siblings and such. So like trying to figure out where my meal is going to go, you know, where my next meal was going to come from, or, you know, where we were going to stay and what we were going to do and such. So for me, school allowed me to have literally a roof over my head, and, you know, food from cafeteria and such,

Dartricia Rollins 05:46

[In agreement] uh huh.

Dr. KR 05:47

and I'm able to find a place for my siblings to go and everything. So it actually was a place of survival for me. And while I was there, that's why, like, folks were like, oh my goodness, you went to school for 11 years straight through. How did you do it? Bitch, I needed to like,

Dr. KR 06:01

you know, like I really needed- that's how I survived, you know. And not just like my physical safety, but my, like, emotional and psychological safety, you know, and being able to not have to in those moments worry about, you know, all these forms of safety so I can focus on like one thing. And I think very often for black folks, queer folks, we're not able to just focus on, like, this one thing, because we're like, navigating the world that's attacking us on all different angles and such. So I was able to, "Okay, let me focus on the goal of, like, getting this down degree so I can, like, get a job and, like, have health insurance and take care of my siblings, and then they can go to school." That was the focus.

All 06:01

[Laughter]

Dr. KR 06:06

And I think while I was going through there... I don't know if this journey so I'm alone for you, but when I was going through that. I remember I went to school, I wanted to be pre-med, and then I was like, "mmm I don't know. Like, there's importance in medicine." And also, I didn't know at the point how do I enter into, like, this medical industrial complex and show up the ways in which I need to for my communities. I didn't have a lot of the language or the lens behind, like, how I wanted to enter into that system. But I knew, like, I wasn't ready. Like, I knew that wasn't really it, but I did know, like, I saw a lot of injustices and inequities with my people dying and becoming very sick, including, my close, close family, because of like, people not listening to us. At the time, when I was going to school, my great grandmother was misdiagnosed with, like a respiratory illness, but was late term lung cancer, and it was at a place where the images were very clear, but the white doctor just was like, "Oh, you just have asthma and a respiratory like illness. You should probably move out of LA." Because, you know, there's a lot of smog and things of that nature. And, you know, maybe six months later she wasn't with us.

Dr. KR 07:53

And we sued the fuck out of the institution. But also, there wasn't anything that could atone to what what happened. And we see that all the dang time. So at the time when I was going to schools, like, "how do I, like, stop this from happening?" And not like me personally, but what do we do to stop these things happening? And we see it now with just the distrust and how folks are navigated through the healthcare system, not having access to shit we need, like, all these different things. So again, I wasn't ready for medicine in that way, because I had to figure out where the like, the connections between like, social justice and medicine. And I just didn't know.

Dartricia Rollins 08:19

[In agreement] Uh huh

Dr. KR 08:34

And I think through kind of engaging in education as a part of survival, I was able to kind of kind of learn a little bit at how to connect these things. So I started from there. I went to like, a path of policy connected to healthcare and developments in like healthcare administration, and trying to figure out, , "well, maybe", in my younger mind, "maybe, you know, when I'm working in these institutions, I can shift policy and do these things to where, like, we're not seeing these things happen in this one specific institution." I'm like, uh-uh [in disagreement] it's a broader issue. This is around, not just like, global politics or national politics or whatnot. We're talking about, like a culture shift. Like, how are we not just only naming these things, but what is the action behind these things? How do we build and shift power, even if we have to navigate these systems that exist, because we exist in these systems. So, like, even if we have to navigate that we're like- not even just, how do we yield our power? But I think at the time, I was wondering, like, how do we collectively begin to like, I don't even want to say broaden, but like,

09:50

Hmm, what do I want to say? How do we continue to collectively gather and this is before I was engaged directly in reproductive justice. I was still trying to figure out, like, what are all these things like, how are we collectively gathering, how are we collectively moving power? How are we abolishing these systems and re-envisioning how these things can truly be built to serve us and love us and nurture us and get to liberation and freedom. And at the time I didn't have, like, reproductive justice, like, I didn't know those were the things that I was feeling. And then I moved to the south, and I was like, oh, you know. Not that RJ wasn't in other places, but I just didn't, I didn't, like, meet RJ, like me and RJ didn't court each other, until I literally came to the South. And I was like, like, that's that was the gap there. Like, I saw these systemic injustices and these healthcare injustices, and then I saw them within my community, like these constant attacks. And then in working in healthcare, working in these things, I'm like, what are the gaps here? And RJ spoke to all of that and more.

Dartricia Rollins 09:56

Yes

Dr. KR 09:59

I don't know if that speaks to what we're doing [laughing].

Dartricia Rollins 10:10

Oh my gosh, incredible. Okay, yes. Um, okay, so I want... How did you end up in Atlanta? What brought you to Atlanta?

Dr. KR 10:19

I'm like, mmm do you want the truth truth?

All 10:22

[Laughter]

Dartricia Rollins 10:46

Whatever truth you want.

Dr. KR 10:50

Because there's multiple things, right?

Dartricia Rollins 11:23

Yeah.

Dr. KR 11:23

Many things to be true at the same time. Okay, so one of the things that brought me to Atlanta, as I said, like, I raised my siblings, and I just had, like, I was kind of the cornerstone of my family, and I never had a chance to actually just like, be, you know, with myself. And I remember coming to Atlanta just one summer, just, you know, was like, go to Atlanta real quick and but, you know, by myself, and it just felt good. I was just like, you know, this is the first time. I mean, even being in LA, yeah, like, it's, there's so many folks and identities and non-black folks everywhere and stuff. And if you're lucky, you see, like, somebody that's black and brown and queer, you like, Hey, what's going on, you know? But when I got to Atlanta, I was like, mmm this feels good.

Dr. KR 12:09

And it disturbed me that it was so unfamiliar. I was like, wow. I love these things. And I can't believe I went this long in my life without being surrounded by, like, black folks all the time, you know, queer folks all the time, like, gender expansive folks, trans folks. And I'm like, like, this is the first time I was like, mmm, you know. So I had a great weekend. And then I was like, legit went back home. And also I was just like, going through a breakup, but, but I had a really great weekend, and I got back home, and I was like, All right, I'm gonna give myself until like, next year. And this was, like, the end of what was like 2015 or something like that. And I was like, All right, I'm gonna give myself- maybe it was 2014 until next year. And I just started like, all right, what do I need to do this shift?

Dr. KR 13:00

And then by that following year, like, six months later, I was here by myself. And I was like, "all right how do I find community? Like, what do I need to do?" And also me, I was by myself, working at the Department of Public Health, which is extra siloed and lonely, and you feel like, what am I doing? Like, oh, I have all this red tape. Like, I'm a public health doctor.

Dr. KR 13:21

Side note, Department of Public Health is located downtown in this massive building, and you go outside and there's all these unhoused folks, displaced folks, and it's like, what are we doing? Our community is here, but we're upstairs meeting, and I'm in meetings with people that look nothing like me, or the people in my community, they're like, all cishet white folks and, like, probably above the age. I don't know white folks kind of age different,

Dartricia Rollins 13:45

[Laughter]

Dr. KR 13:45

But from what I could see, you know older folks that were talking about younger folks that don't look like them, and creating policies and making decisions without any information to back the decisions. And I'm like, there's just so much there, right? Like, there could be a whole other damn story, but like, there's so much there. And I was like, this not- one, yes, it was paying my rent, you know, like, I needed a job, and I knew I needed to be here. And also, this is not what I went into public health. Like, I knew public health has a very harmful history of specifically harming black folks, specifically harming disabled folks. I know the roots of any like, the medical field specifically is very harmful for our communities. And also public health has perpetuated that harm the ways we use black DNA and ourselves to, like, create better science and, you know, vaccinations and things of that nature, but never credit the black folks and harm black folks and etc, right? So, like, I know we've been like-

Dr. KR 14:43

Forced sterilization is a public health move, like, all these different things, and eugenics, population control, medicalization, all these different things. And I knew that in public health, because the tenets of it is to truly draw these intersections of our lives, like all these systems that we're navigating. How do they influence and affect the individual as a part of community? And I was mmm that's it. So when I got into public health, I was like, and also we need to be honest about the things that public health has done and science has done to harm people and take accountability and how we can dismantle and disrupt even the public health system, you know, in general, and truly, like, re-envision what it is. So that's why I got into public health, and I wanted to come to Atlanta and truly be intentional about connecting movement and public health.

Dr. KR 15:31

So I got here, I was with the Department of Public Health, maybe, like, six to nine months later, I was like, I'm not with y'all anymore. Because, like I, I was connected to folks at SPARK, and to be very transparent, SPARK was at a time where they, at the time, were facing the possibility of having to close their doors. And I was connected to, I believe it was a board member. No, I'm sorry, one of my, ironically, one of my black colleagues, like one of my only black colleagues at Department of Public Health, went to a fair, met a board member, was in conversation, and they named that like they're looking for an executive director, and connected me with them. We courted before we even discussed getting this job for literally, maybe six months of like, "Hey, this is reality. Our doors may close like, This is who we are. Let's have these conversations." It was so long term, but I felt that was needed. The level of commitment, that transparency, that directness of like, this is not just an organization, because as we know- and I said this a little earlier in today's conversation of like movement work was happening way before we were even thought of, right, like, all this movement work. And the reason why I moved into like a non-for-profit sector or a formalized like organization is because people have to get paid. But with that comes the not for profit industrial complex and all these things, right? But people have to get paid and stuff. So I wanted to, like, in this courtship, be very clear of like, okay, well, this is a movement space, so making sure that, like, we are still being very true to the tenants of this organization, and also this commitment of like, if we're at the time where the only like RJ group that like, out loud, intentionally centered like queer trans liberation within our framework in RJ in the South. Not that, you know, RJ isn't queer and trans liberation and such, but we were naming these things and talking about, like digital organizing and media and everything, like, you know, many, many years ago, when we started in 2007.

Dr. KR 15:46

As we're shaping this organization and understanding the importance of SPARK. Are you, you, know, to myself, are you the right person to be in this space, to truly, begin to build new relationships? Because, you know we were, you know about to close our doors and stuff. And also, are you up for this? Because it's gonna take years, like, like building not just an organization, right? That's one thing. But like, building trust in community, broadening our community, like all of these different things takes intentional relationship building, and it takes many, many years. So like, that's why the courtship took a little longer. Not even know what our initial question was, but that's what I got.

Dartricia Rollins 18:31

what I got.

Dartricia Rollins 18:33

Well, you got me, like, all the way to, like, a really good point, because, like, one of my questions is, how did you get into reproductive justice? But you've already kind of named it, and so I'm curious about, once you got into an RJ organization, what has that been like? Like embodying the tenets of reproductive justice in your work, coming from the public health field, and finding that very specific intersection of like we're doing- like this is still like health work, but with a very much social justice lens.

Dr. KR 19:10

Yeah, um. I think, well, at least for me, not even because of like trying to blend those intersections was it- not challenging, but was it. Yeah, I could say challengeing. Was it like this new task, whether not because of, like, this intention, of, like, winning public health and all these different things. But more so is because when SPARK like, our team thinks of like our political lineage and what brought us to this work. We also think of SPARK as being a political home to folks. And also because of that, we've had to be intentional about like, well, what is our politic at SPARK? Like, like, you know, like, we all are individuals and moving through this world and have different lived experience and such. But as an organization and as a space that invites people into it and having responsibility of this space what is our value set in politics, outside of mission, vision and values and blah, blah. You know, like, what is our politics?

Dr. KR 20:17

And while we may not all be in the same place all at once, but this right here, this is our politic for this organization. And we hope that it's the political home for many folks, and if it's not, that's okay too. Like, you can also have multiple political homes. So I think that for me and kind of having these different intersecting lens, I think we all do. you know, so like, like, I wouldn't even say, like, yeah, I got some letters behind my name, officially, Dr Redmon, like, on a resume, or something like that, right? But like, I think that we all have, like. Well, one I'm, I don't think, like, I'm coming from a public health lens. I think that's just something I learned along the way. Like to like that the you know, through academia, I was able to, like, get this title. But I think like we all if we're existing in our bodies and our identities, we all understand, like, the dynamics of public health and how it intersects with our ability to navigate through life. And then, you know, the colonial imposition that is public health, as well as all these other things and such.

Dr. KR 21:13

So I don't think I necessarily came as like, this public health person, per se or anything. I think I came into this space with two things. One, with that political lineage of abolitionists and such. And I think it was almost like, can I bring that into the space? Because even 10 years ago I don't know if- I'm sure folks were saying it, but like, at least in RJ community, I didn't hear a lot of language around abolition. So I was like, okay, so what does that look like in RJ and we were doing abolition work, but like, you know, now we're really saying the shit, and I'm like, oh, okay, so like, what? So I was just kind of, like, trying to figure out, what is our lens and what is my lens?

Dr. KR 22:01

And also, the second thing I was going to name is like, I think that because, yes institutions save me as far as like school and things like that, right? And also as you're learning these things, you learn certain normalities of how you embody and perpetuate whiteness and white supremacy and professionalism and respectability politics and all these different things. And like, even going to medical school and you see like in our books and such like, you don't see brown skin. You know, they teach you how to kind of like center whiteness in all of the work, even if it's not said, right? And that's in every institution. I think that because of that, it is a constant for me to try to be intentional of how am I showing up in a way that it could potentially be problematic? And how can I dismantle and disrupt systems that are perpetuated in me or whatnot, and in some of, like, my, like, relative privilege. You know, being light skinned, being smaller bodied, you know, shit, being cishet assume, you know, all of these different things. How can I constantly dismantle or challenge that, unlearn things, learn things, decenter myself, center others when needed. Like, how do I, how do I kind of do that dance in a way. Not even, how do I- Intentionally doing that dance. And, you know, so that's, that's a part and in medicine or public health, you're taught [to] leave yourself at the door and, like, that's impossible. Like, it's not realistic, you know. And people like, it's not like, you have to bring all of your experience into one, like, space when you're doing these things. And also, like, if you're saying you're leaving yourself out the door, like, how can you do any of movement work? Like, that's just not a part of it. So I think that, like, for folks, including myself, that are like, Oh, going from like, this very structured health, like environment and coming into like, more movement, kind of space or whatnot, like a task is being sure to, like, also unlearn a lot of things that we are constantly learning throughout systems.

Dr. KR 24:19

Hopefully I'm clear through my response,

Dartricia Rollins 24:23

yeah, no, you are very clear. And so I'm curious about, you know, we're here at the SPARK Reproductive Justice Justice Now conference in 2024. What is your hope for the conference? What is your hope for people to get out of it, for you to get out of it, especially in this moment?

Dr. KR 24:52

I think my hope, and I feel like the SPARK team's hope, because we've had many conversations in like, cultivating this space or whatever, is the same hope we had like in 2018/19, when we were first creating the Justice Now 2020 conference. While I'll name that we know that any government system, electoral

political system, is not set to see us free, and it's not designed for getting us liberation of freedom. And also we're navigating it. So we knew in like 2018ish/19, that in 2020 the administration was going to shift, the federal administration was going to shift. And that's when the first time Trump was up for election. Everything was that. And there was, like, this, not for black folks, but like, for non black folks, there's this awakening of, like, oh no. Like, what's going to happen and this and that. And then, you know, Trump won the election and such, and folks are like, Oh my gosh. Like, now what in black folks are like, I mean, it's, it's, we're doing the same things we always been doing. Like, it's like, you know, like, chill, chill, to folks like, and so in 2019 ish, 2020 we design, or we try to create just now, 2020 as a space of just like, us to be together and love on each other. Us to be together and really, like, just rest and not to be like, Oh, now we gotta, like, do more things. Like, no, like, let's just have a space to just be, to be around each other as a form of like building and shifting power. And while we can like, yes, share strategies, but strategies can look like many different ways. It can look like art. It can look like culture. It can look like like yesterday. We had Ricky and hilly circle and, you know, we had taro readings and like so many different things, music and dance like, it can look like so many different things. It can also look like direct action, look like all these things, right? So like, that intention was set of like, let's just be because like we not only deserve, but like, it should be a constant that we get spaces, many different spaces, to just like, hey, what's going on? Like, nice to actually see you, and let's grab a bite, or whatever it is, and that that love and that rest and all of that is a part of our, like, active strategy for liberation and freedom, and who is being centered in those spaces. Because, like, as you all know, you can go to conference spaces, and you might see some executive directors, and then, like, That's it, and maybe they'll have, like, the plus one and stuff, or like, somebody from an institution or school or Department of whatever and stuff, and it's like and like is that truly who we need and want to center like, you know, and at the time, at the time, you know, and spark is still very small, but at the time we had, like, maybe four or five staff, and we were not awful time and stuff. And we're like, but we need to have this space. And I remember folks questioning us, like, not, not moving. Folks, funders, like, do you think y'all should be holding this space? Like them? Like, no, this is exactly why we need to hold this space. Like and some, some funders were like, Why don't you let like, some like, more mega nonprofits, doing, you know, on these I'm like, No. Like, you know, we have movement organizations that hold down these spaces all the time, you know? And even if we have two people in this space that show up, like, those two people are gonna have a fucking amazing time, that's what we're gonna do, you know, like, that's it and stuff. So we're like, you know what? No, we know, like that. We just need a space with these intentions and our folks, and let's just be and then we, you know, we created that in all of that, in 2020 during COVID, and it was a virtual space, and folks were like, Oh my gosh, even virtually, this is the best space we've been in. Like, we have Hulu tutorials and like, naps and stuff and, like, it was awesome. Um, and then and 2023 early last year, we're like, the whole 2024 is coming up, and we knew another electoral voting year and such. And, you know, people felt many different type of ways. People felt, you know, scared, anxious, felt like, Ah, it's the same thing. You know, there's many different feelings. And we were like, you know, what? Just we should do a justice now, 2024 let's try to have it in person in Atlanta, in the south, where we're where we're based to as well. We're based in the West End, but we're downtown right now, and the intention of this space was just that the same, like in 2020. Is like, how do we center black, queer, black, trans, black, gender expansive, black, young folks in a space to just be love on each other, to be able to rest, to take a fucking nap, you know, like, Go lay down. And we literally have a room with nap spaces to go lay down. I was not very hard listen. I had to catch myself this mask on, you know, that was wide open. Um, but, but like, just to be and also, like,

have conversation, and, you know, learn things, unlearn things, like, bring folks together. And one of the things I said this morning is, like, we're not here to like, again. Do more. Put more on our backs. Do XYZ. Yes, this work's going to continue, because that's how we exist. That's how we survive. And also it's okay to it's more than okay to. Come together and just be like, Hey, let's just have a good time, you know, um, let's again, like, experience it, like joy and beauty and rest as a part of our strategy towards liberation and freedom.