

INTERSECTIONS RADIO

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TRANSCRIPT

SARIKA MEHTA: You are listening to K-XRY Portland, on 107.1 FM, 91.1 FM, and streaming online at XRAY.fm. I'm Sarika Mehta. Welcome to Intersections Radio, a new independent podcast which also airs on XRAY. Intersections Radio is the show where we geek out on all things intersectionality.

Today's episode features one of my favorite activists. Leroy Moore is a disability justice activist, hiphop artist, writer, and more. He's based out of the San Francisco Bay area, so on my recent trip to the Bay, we met up at the Golden Lotus Restaurant in downtown Oakland. Leroy has been featured on Intersections Radio before, in fact, for our inaugural broadcast last year. Since then, he's published Black Kripple Delivers Poetry and Lyrics, and he's shared his latest collaborative album, Krip Hop Nation and Fifth Battalion Entertainment present Broken Bodies - Police Brutality Profiling Mixtape. So we talked about his book, the intersectionality of disability justice and the Black Lives Matter movement, and how nonprofits hinder activism. This is Intersections Radio.

Thank you, Leroy, for joining me again on Intersections Radio. Let's first talk about your book, as I said, Black Kripple Delivers Poetry and Lyrics. Talk about the power behind both the title and the book.

LEROY MOORE: Yeah, the title was -- the reason why I used Kripple with a K, I really want to take back the language of people with disabilities that people without disabilities place on us, and put it in a hip hop way. So, as everybody knows, the Crips and the Bloods, that story, come to find out that the story came from a person that was in the Crips and that was disabled. They were like, we'll just call you cripple, then it's like, no, we'll just shorten it into Crip. That's what I read, that's how the name came from.

SARIKA MEHTA: Wait. Am I understanding that the Crips, the gang from LA, got their name from the word "cripple"?

LEROY MOORE: Yeah. Yeah.

SARIKA MEHTA: I had no idea.

LEROY MOORE: I didn't know either. But I read it somewhere, I was like, oh, okeh. They got it from "cripple". So, I wanted to take that back and use a K, just in a, you know, hip hop way, you know, you guys are reclaiming our language, and reclaiming our history, and bringing it to today. Yeah.

SARIKA MEHTA: And, with that, you have this volume of poetry and lyrics. So tell me about, tell me about the process of writing this.

LEROY MOORE: Oh, god, you know, I've been writing poetry since the 80s. So, I've got the, you know, all through that time, before computers, you know? So, in the 90s, I got in touch with Poor Magazine in San Francisco, and, in the 90s, Poor Magazine did a chapbook. Remember chapbooks back in the day? Chapbooks are really books of poetry poets do without the Uncle Sam stamp of the

ISB number. Those little chapbooks they used to do at Kinko's and stuff? So Poor Magazine had a press, a really small press called the Poet Press, and they did my first chapbook.

And, at that time, it's incredible, you know, at the time, I sold like 500 copies in one day. How know I did that, I was reading here, in San Francisco, and I flew to LA and I did a reading, so we just sold out, just like that. So, that history, in coming up today, I've always wrote poetry and song lyrics. So I just kept them, and I was trying to find a publisher, you know, like all writers, you get a lot of rejection letters. And the common rejection was, you know, your writing doesn't have any audience, because publishers at that time had no clue about, you know, disability, disability culture, disability rights. You know, it's almost like black artists, when they started. You know, the publishing company's like, oh, there's no audience. So, I ran into that many times. Regular publishers, even black publishers, because I really wanted to be published by a black publisher.

So, you know, so I kept on going, and only about two years ago, a friend of mine, we used to do open mic in the 90s, she's Native American, she lives in San Francisco, Kim. And Kim, we talked online and Kim's like, you don't have a book out yet? I'm like, no, because, you know, no publisher's want to take it. So Kim is like, oh, let me hook you up with Poetic Matrix. They're a small poetry press. So she hooked me up with Downs, with James Downs, works there and James Downs is like, yeah, let me see your stuff. And James Downs saw my stuff and passed it on to the publisher, and so, that's how the book came to be.

SARIKA MEHTA: I want to go back to what you were talking about, that the -- one of the struggles you had in getting this published is that it's like a niche audience, that they were saying you need to have an audience and there wasn't an audience for the issues of, you know, a black person with a disability, or whatever their excuse was. Talk about the response after you did get this published.

LEROY MOORE: After I got it published, you know, because, back in those days, when I'd get the rejection letters, you know, independent press were high. Now today, it's the opposite, there's a lack of independent presses and there's a lack of black presses. So, you know, I felt good about getting the work out there. A lot of presses that I went to in the 90s were gone. So, you know, I really bypassed that, and really talked to my community. And a lot people, a lot of black youth, you know, loved it, a lot of black youth. As a matter of fact, I'm going to Chicago in April, and their independent living center, Access Living, has a group of black disabled activists and artists, so they're excited to have me there.

So, you know, that's the reason why I did it, you know, it's for black kids that are people growing up now, you know, and give the history and the struggle, and -- you know.

SARIKA MEHTA: Well, you're -- I mean, you're right, there's hardly anything out there with this perspective, frankly. I would imagine that this has reached a new audience, and I was wondering, have you received any response from readers?

LEROY MOORE: Oh, yeah, I mean, you know, friends that read that have really liked it. One artist whose visual artwork is in the book, and he is an activist, and I mailed him a copy. He's in prison, unfortunately, and he loved it. You know, he's a black man with a disability. He said, Leroy, this could go into schools. You know, because I have, in the back of the book I have these trivia questions, black disabled history trivia questions. And he said, wow, this could go into schools, because, you know, black disabled youth don't know this history. And even teachers don't know it, you know? So, yeah, I get those kind of response.

SARIKA MEHTA: Even those of us who are outsiders to this, to what your experiences are, I mean everyone can benefit.

Leroy has a history of working in the issues of police brutality and people with disabilities. With the new wave of press and praise for the Black Lives Matter movement, I wondered about the place of people of color with disabilities.

LEROY MOORE: Matter of fact in the book, chapter two is about police brutality against people with disabilities. And every chapter I start with a quote, and on chapter two I start with a quote from my niece, back, back in, I think it was a couple of years ago when they were living here. I used to pick up my niece and nephews from school, and my niece, Ace, one time ran out and, you know, grabbed my hand and she looked up at me and she says, Uncle Wewoy, I don't like cops because they mess with you. You know, because she witnessed cops, you know, profiling me because of my disability.

SARIKA MEHTA: How old was she when she said that?

LEROY MOORE: Oh my god, Ace was about, I think, four or five, I think. You know, so, it --

SARIKA MEHTA: What did you say then?

LEROY MOORE: What did I say? I was like, Ace, like, Ace, yeah, I totally understand your frustration. You've seen a lot, and, you know, just keep on holding onto that activism and being yourself. You know? So, it's funny. If kids can see it, but not adults, it's just totally profiling. I've been involved with police brutality issue since the 80s, back in New York and Connecticut. And of course here in the bay area, you know, way before Black Lives Matter, you know. I've been involved with October 22nd Coalition. Poor Magazine's been involved with police brutality. I've been involved with the Idriss Stelly Foundation, Idriss's son got shot up at the Sony Metreon in San Francisco. So, you know, the issue of police brutality has always been here, in the history of black disabled men, women, friends, you know, youth, has been here. You know the sad thing, even today, is that, I don't know why, but there's a lack of connection between movements around disability and around poverty. You know, if you're poor, black, and disabled, you know, I guess there's no bling bling for activism or activists to come and support. You know, it just blows my mind.

SARIKA MEHTA: So, do you feel like, do you feel solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement or do you feel like -- how do you feel about this?

LEROY MOORE: I think Black Lives Matter is, you know, is doing their piece. I think, in activism in today's society, we need to stop putting all our eggs in one basket. There's many people that are doing great work. You know, as I said, the Idriss Stelly Foundation, you know. So, I think, yeah, Black Lives Matter could learn around disability justice with Sins Invalid, if they ever take that up. But I also see that there's other grassroots collectives that are kicking butt, you know? There's this group in New York called the People's Assembly, and I interviewed them last month, and they did a whole rally around police brutality, with people with disabilities, controlled by people with disabilities. So, those are the activists that I want to get in contact with. You know, I was just talking to a disabled activist this morning in DC that wanted to do a campaign around police brutality against people with disabilities.

So, those are the people that I want to really concentrate on, because I think, and I'm not -- I think they're really closer to the issue, closer to grassroots issues, you know, they're not looking for -- I'm not saying that Black Lives Matter is, but they're not looking for being on TV to talk about it. You know,

they're looking for, you know, what's our community response about it, you know. So, those are the people that I want to concentrate on. And if Black Lives Matter comes around and be more open, then yeah, let's talk about it. I think we have, in this time, we need to do something now. We could wait until other collectives get around to the issue, but the people that are doing stuff on police brutality and people with disabilities need to really do that work.

SARIKA MEHTA: Before we started recording our interview, you had said, you said we've been around much longer than the Black Lives Matter movement, and it's not to say that the issues haven't been around, it's just, I think, I assume that you meant that the work that you've been doing, the work that all these other collectives have been doing, has been around longer. But Black Lives Matter seems to have gotten more awareness, or more press, or something.

LEROY MOORE: Yeah, I mean, you go back to 1918, you know, and the lynching, in -- the story of Jesse Washington, a young black man with a disability who was lynched, you know. So, the issue has been around since slavery, you know, so it's nothing new, and you know, the Black Panthers did their work on it, you know. So, yeah, the issue has been around, you know. And that's all we can do is do our work and, hopefully, that people will come to an awareness, and not only an awareness, but put people with disabilities in speaking roles, you know. You know, in front of the rally, not in back, and really incorporate what disability justice looks like, you know. It's more than just a rally.

SARIKA MEHTA: What does disability justice look like?

LEROY MOORE: That's a good question. And, you know, I give it up to my friend Patty Berne, that really, Patty Berne and me that really sat down years ago and talked about, you know, disability justice and how is it different from disability rights, and, you know, just talked about how people were left out in the civil rights movement, you know. Transgender people with disabilities, people of color with disabilities, and how does that look like. And, you know, Patty's like, you know, how can we move together. So, disability justice really challenges people about not only ableism but how institutions can really look on how we can change the environment when it comes to, when it comes to practicing our values in institutions. You know, if, for example, Sins Invalid always starts out with, and in the meeting, access needs.

SARIKA MEHTA: Hold on one second. Maybe first explain what is Sins Invalid, and then talk about that.

LEROY MOORE: Yeah. Sins Invalid is a performance group and also a disability justice group in the Bay Area, that is run by and controlled by people of color, transgender people, queer people, and, yeah, it's a performance group and also Sins Invalid does disability justice trainings, you know, around the Bay Area and nationally. So, we really looked at, you know, if we're going to include, if we're going to have people with disabilities, trans people with disabilities, disabled people of color, you know, how does that look like in our institutions? How can we make it more accessible?

So, when we're in meeting, we first ask, you know, what's your access needs to be in this meeting? Because, you know, me growing up I was so used to Robert's Rules when it comes to meetings, you know, you take a vote and all that stuff. But really, you know, we're going to say, you know, that doesn't work for us and this doesn't work for a person with a disability. They need breaks, you know. So, yeah. Disability justice is not only a 9 to 5, but it's a practice throughout your life. And trying to get that into activist circles is hard, because a lot of activists deal with campaign, which you have a target goal, you have a target to hire, and where it seems to, you know, rush rush rush to that goal.

SARIKA MEHTA: And this especially is an election year.

LEROY MOORE: Yeah, and that doesn't help anybody. You know? So, yeah. So, Sins Invalid is, you know, trying to express that kind of way of doing our work, you know, if it's activism, if it's a nonprofit trying to incorporate disability justice into our work, especially in the left. The left has no clue around disability. You know? And still, and today in 2016, you know, we can look at activism and you can say, all right, where are people with disabilities? You know, you look at a rally, and you look at who's at the back of the rally, it's people with disabilities. So why are they left in the back. You know? It's things like that.

SARIKA MEHTA: I pressed Leroy to explain what this meant. Who are the left? And what does this mean for activists with disabilities?

LEROY MOORE: You know, the left, because I'm an activist first, I say I'm a poet and all this stuff, but I'm an activist first, and growing up in an activist family, the left to me was activists. You know? It was activist organizations, was Rainbow Coalition back in the 70s. And today, you know, of course, we include some nonprofits into the circle. So my view about the left is more about people that are activists, organizations that grew out of activism, you know. So, yeah.

SARIKA MEHTA: And you said that you don't feel that they have been really doing their part in aligning with you guys?

LEROY MOORE: Aligning with disability? No, unfortunately, and it's so sad to say, you know, so sad to say in 2016 that it's still like that. You know? You know, and there's a whole history of the disability rights movement and people of color are activist movements, because both of them were going on at the same time in the 70s and 60s, but disability rights movement, I have to say, was at that time a middle class, white movement. So my mother never got in contact with the disability rights movement, although, you know, she knew about services for me, but she never, you know, felt at home in the disability rights movement because it was mainly a white, straight man's movement. So if you've got that history, then of course, people of color, activists on the left, don't see disability as a part of their movement because of racism, ableism, and not really, in, on people of color's side, not really knowing about disability history, disability rights.

You know, although I say disability rights was a white movement, if you go beyond the rights, disability was, you know, a black, a people of color. You know? I mean, blues started with blind blues, you know, performers. So, people of color with disabilities have been there, you know. Harriet Tubman had a disability, so, you know, that kind of history, that kind of culture is there, but it's not brought out for the black community or the people of color community, and then the disability community, you know, race is still not talked about in a deep kind of way.

SARIKA MEHTA: Those are the main issues I wanted to talk about. Is there anything else you wanted to bring out while we're hanging out here in Oakland?

LEROY MOORE: Yeah. I also want to talk about the nonprofit system. It's hard, it's hard, it's hard because the nonprofit system and activism have been intertwined for so many years. Yeah, I see nowadays that a lot of our activism comes from nonprofits, and I see that restricts what we can do, you know, because of grants and stuff. So, yeah, I see that as a really, thing that we really need to really think about, if we -- and, at the Social Justice Convention back in Atlanta years ago, they had this

slogan about, A different world is possible. Though if that slogan is right, then we need to come up with totally new ways of doing our work. You know? If a different world is possible, then we need to really critique why a lot of us think that policy is the only way to change things. You know, we need to see why a lot of our activism has become nonprofit, and can we come up with a new strategy to really, or a new foundation, or new ventures to construct that, because if we're not, then we're just going in circles. You know?

I found out that a lot of groups, I won't say their names, but a lot of groups that are fighting against gentrification are taking grants from tech industries.

SARIKA MEHTA: Well, that's an interesting irony.

LEROY MOORE: Yeah, I know, like hello. How can you fight gentrification if you're taking a grant from Google? You know, so, yeah, it just blows my mind. But I think -- yeah, I don't know. I think we've been so used to this structure, this nonprofit structure, that we can't think of a new way to do things. You know? Because it's tied to our jobs, you know, I mean, tech capitalism's always tied to our jobs, you know, I mean no wonder we can't think of new solutions because if we do, that means we're out of a job. So it's, yeah, it's hard.

SARIKA MEHTA: Leroy Moore, thank you so much for taking the time out of your schedule to chat with me here in Oakland, and for a really great interview. Thank you so much.

LEROY MOORE: Yeah, thank you.

SARIKA MEHTA: That was Leroy Moore, hip hop artist and disability justice activist. He's the author of *Black Kipple Delivers Poetry And Lyrics*. To engage with interviews, read transcripts, and learn more, check out IntersectionsRadio.wordpress.com. Visit the same website for previous episodes of this podcast. And, join the Facebook community at facebook.com/IntersectionsRadio. I'm Sarika Mehta, and this has been Intersections Radio. Thanks for listening.