

# **Text Transcript of “Off the Shelf” Podcast Season 2, Episode 4, with Ruby Mendenhall**

## **Augustus Wood:**

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to “Off the Self: Revolutionary Readings in Times of Crisis.” This is your host, Gus Wood, and of course we are sponsored by the Humanities Research Institute at the University of Illinois, so we got to give a big shout out to them. But I am really excited about today's episode because I'm joined by one of one of my dear colleagues and wonderful people, who I was lucky enough to study with when I was a graduate student and now I'm, I'm just I'm just happy that she's able to share her work with not just me but other people. She's doing some amazing things. Dr. Ruby Mendenhall. And so yeah, this is going to be an exciting episode. Somebody who I've been, I tried to get on the show last season, but I ran out of time. But that's OK though, because people have been waiting to hear from you. And so let me just do it. So, I just want to say thank you first of all for, for coming on “Off the Shelf.”

## **Ruby Mendenhall:**

Thank you. I am happy to be here. Thank you for the invitation. Looking forward to our conversation.

## **Augustus Wood:**

Wonderful. And so let me tell our listeners a little bit about Dr. Mendenhall. So, Dr. Mendenhall is a professor of sociology and African American Studies at the University of Illinois here. She is an associate dean for diversity and democratization of health innovation at the Carle Illinois College of Medicine. Her research examines Black mothers' resiliency and spirituality and how living in a racially segregated neighborhood with high levels of violence affects their mental and physical health. Recent grants from the National Science Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation and the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, support or will support work around training community health workers and citizens and citizen scientists.

Dr. Mendenhall discusses her vision for healing in her TEDxUUIC talk entitled “Dreaming,” that's that's capital “D R E A M ing and Designing Spaces of Hope.” And so just to kind of just get started with this, I mean, I was, I remember it was it was in 2015 when you brought me in and and and to to your office and we were talking about this Black mothers project and we were gonna be um coding some data that you had done. And this was really one of the most exciting things for me at that time and now to see where you have gone with it and now you're doing all this amazing work, the grants, and now having the new position as the associate dean since the last time I worked with you on that. So tell me, talk to me about how your project has moved to this particular point on African American mothers.

## **Ruby Mendenhall:**

Yes, I'd love to. First of all, I'm I'm very grateful for the mothers who shared their stories. We talked to almost 100 low-income African American mothers on the south side of Chicago living in neighborhoods, most of them living in neighborhoods with high levels of violence, and just the stories um about headaches, backaches, stomachaches and their hair falling out. Um but then

also the resiliency, right? Being able to love and still raise their children, um, go to work, um, was just transforming for me. So I I'd love to hear how it affected you, but it was also transforming for me. And what I took from those interviews and the wisdom and cultural wealth of those mothers, um, is what I'm doing now in terms of um, trying to train, um individuals. I've been mostly working with high school students, but then with the MacArthur funding, will work with high school students plus young adults up to age 21 to become community health workers, right? So those trusted individuals in the community who hopefully will serve as a bridge between community members and the medical profession, but especially kind of bridge, a bridge in terms of culture, right? A bridge in terms of respect, a bridge in terms of, um, opening up opportunities around what health and wellness looks like and who delivers that health and wellness.

And then also around the citizen science part, many of the mothers like I said, they had those complaints, but a lot of times they weren't, didn't seem to be as clear, um, in terms of understanding how much stress played in that. And so that's part of the community scientists' work to just kind of capture how stress is affecting, um, the Black and brown community, and then what can be done about it.

And then that leads to the wellness store that we are working on with Rachel Switzky from the um Seibel Center for Design, and then also Joe Bradley, who's in bioengineering, the College of Business, and also at the medical school. And part of the wellness store is to put high-tech and low-tech tools that will foster wellness, and again, that's deeply embedded in individuals' culture. Um when I give my talks, I talk about how my great-great-grandmother was an enslaved human in this country and um they have passed down coping mechanisms, resiliency, some of them, I don't even know and don't even understand, but they're there and that's why I'm still here able to talk to you at this moment and how can we capture those um jewels, and think about putting them um in the wellness store in terms of high-tech and low-tech, um, healing modalities.

### **Augustus Wood:**

Wow, yeah, this is... why this is so prevalent now, and I mean, it's always, it's, it's within the Black community we've always had to, as you just mentioned, consider, how do we strategize resiliency? How do we strategize community building? You know, you can go back to, I think really one of the most important works being John Blasingame's *Slave Community* because he was one of the first scholars and he was a sociologist as well, um he was one of the first scholars that really put out there that there was this community of resiliency within slave communities during, during enslavement and that the healing aspect of it was so dynamic that, as you mentioned, things were carried from the traditional African motherland as well as developed within the cultural underpinnings that made them African Americans after a while.

And so seeing that and seeing your research go into how Black women today, particularly following the COVID pandemic, following the 2010s, which were ravaged by this immense inequality and poverty, education, et cetera, and to deal with the types of violence that comes from those types of consequences, is very, it's very kind of, I wanna say, I wanna say it's revolutionary because we've been kind of trying to figure out solutions to dealing with these kinds of issues and in terms of resiliency.

And I go back to the work I did with you and I read those stories, the interviews you did with those women, and as somebody who grew up in a neighborhood like that in Atlanta where, I mean we were averaging what department four or five murders a week, and that was just on

average... and a lot of, and again, this was supposed to be in a, in a transformative city, right? A global city. So I think about the ways in which we talk about kin and kinship networks building resiliency around the fact that we have a community of people struggling through the same conditions and therefore we try to find networks and as you as what you're doing, bring in technology to use to kind of to to to to to build a stronger community in the face of these types of conditions. And that's what I really love about what you're doing is that you're trying to, you're trying to operationalize solution-driven interventions, something that is, as you and I both know a lot of scholarship just like to just talk about things. But when it comes to actually, okay, let's actually think about ways we can solve this. Let's test out some stuff. You're actually on the forefront doing that. So talk to me, how did you get to this point?

### **Ruby Mendenhall:**

I would say it goes back to my work at Cook County Hospital, um, then Cook County Hospital now John Stroger, when I worked, um, in the pediatric occupational therapy unit, but I was also on the protective service team. And a lot of the babies came in failing to thrive, and so they were small for their age. And when we, as the protective service team, right, the medical establishment asked the families, um, what was wrong, um, it was mostly mothers Black and Latinx who said that they couldn't afford to feed their babies. And so that's why the babies weren't growing. And so after hearing the story over and over again, I was like, ok, this isn't about if the moms um, love their kids, if they know how to take care of their kids, it's about will society provide enough resources for them to take care of their kids? And so that's what led me to get a master's in public policy from the Harris School of Public Policy. So I, so I love... like my favorite times in class was when we had to come up with policy solutions, right? To kind of outline the problem and then what's the solution? And so then, um, after I graduated, I went to work at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, um you know, working in the community and then they had a grant for early head start and we got the grant, and it was in Robert Taylor Homes.

And I remember telling people that you know what, I want to go work in Robert Taylor Homes with the grant and everybody was like who does that? Why do you want to leave downtown, who leaves downtown to go to work in the Robert Taylor communities? But I was trying to answer the question of the mothers in society, and also when I was in those policy circles, it was mostly white males who were committed to the cause, but when I looked around the table, I was like, well why aren't the mothers who are struggling with these issues, why aren't they around the table thinking about solutions? So I think I've always been geared towards um solutions to um really trying to see practical change. And so even now, um, when I was doing my study with almost 100 mothers and I was thinking: ok, we're gonna do policy change, tell us what's wrong, like what you need, we're gonna work together for policy change. And one of the mothers just waited for me to finish all the interviews and she was like, you know, I just want to say thank you for coming and asking about how we're doing, what we need... and as she was talking and even later, I was thinking ok, so that was about recognizing her humanity, that was about asking for things now, right? So thinking about policy and the long term—and we all know how long it takes to change policy—but to be with someone and to ask them what do you need, I'm here to work with you, I think it's very powerful. And I know we'll talk about books later, but one of the books that I was reading recently, *Mighty Be Our Powers* by Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee that I had the wonderful opportunity to interview... and she talks about something like that in her book, she talks about the importance of being with people, whatever they are, whatever they're doing. And even I remember reading stories when they were trying to rally people to vote and

she said she would go to the women's houses and they would say, you know, I need to cook, and she's like that's ok, we have somebody who can help you cook, right? I need to iron my husband's shirt, that's ok, we have someone who can do it, right? And just, um, providing the basic things that people needed to be well and then to go and do these, um, radical revolutionary things. So I think that's also part of it.

**Augustus Wood:**

Awesome. I love the way you put this in that, you know, we we often hear people, scholars say this... that they want to they want to make their they want to make their the people they're researching humans, they want to make them agents. And then when you read what they write, it's like they kind of... they disappear, you know? But the fact that you, yeah, but the fact that you were in the room and you were able to bring those in struggle within the room to help develop the situations, that's how you that's how you open up someone's agency and allow what what what I call self self-emancipatory moments. Because not only are they coming... not only are they getting new innovative ways to struggle and deal with those issues of their conditions, but they're also working with someone like you who has a skill set and expertise in areas and so they're learning from you as well as as well as you're learning from them. And that's a relationship that I always I always tell other scholars who are getting ready to do research or they're interested in the field: I say if you're just gonna sit and read some books then you're especially if you're talking about something related to the oppression of people, Black, Latinx, et cetera, then you're missing out on a very important part of the research because again, the agency of these people is so crucial to how we can actually, as you do, properly problematize. Because you and I have seen this and I know you're gonna talk about this, but there are a lot of books that come out where they'd be in history in my field of sociology, that attempt to problematize and then come up with interventions where they have no interaction with the people they're studying whatsoever. And the scary thing about that is as you just mentioned about how policy, how long it takes people, to how long it takes policy to change, most of the policy we're dealing with now comes from that type of research. And so the research you're doing and the research that myself and others do, in terms of putting the Black working class or the people in struggle at the center of this stuff... we are ways away from that long change where our stuff is gonna be central. But because you're you've been you've been moving and shaking and get and and getting a lot of these different grants and fellowships etcetera. You know, you're moving very fast towards a new type of way to have these discussions, which is important. So, my question for you is, what is your vision for what you want your research to do?

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

Yeah. Well I'll give you big, um the big, big vision. So, when we applied for the grant from the MacArthur project, right, the title of it is "Centering Youth's Health and Wellness: Designing Renaissance and Third Reconstruction." Right? So that's kind of um, what I think about, right? Renaissance as being a period of intense art and science, right? And the third reconstruction, I see it as a point like the first one after slavery, when Blacks made the great advancement, and then, um, Brown versus Board of Education, Civil Rights Era, that's the second. And then the third being this moment, um, with George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, all the other ones, and, um, the people in the streets really protesting against the oppression that continues in our society. And then how can we take it further, right? And we, and we've seen kind of resources flow to the Black community as a result of this. But how can we think about um a shift in this society

that will be, um, permanent, longstanding, and, um, really one about liberation, right? The end of oppression. So that's kind of the big vision and then kind of one step to that, and again, kind of circling back to this policy table as part of the MacArthur project, we're gonna have a policy clinic where we'll have legislators working with us. So the clinic will be nonpartisan, I want to make sure that's clear, we won't be doing advocacy or any lobbying, but the young people will be at the table with the legislators talking about their lived experiences, talking about what's working in their life, what's not, talking about policy and how it's impacting them. So that's also another way, um, that I'm hoping some of them will become interested in being legislators, the leaders, um, local school councils, and other places. That that's kind of, um, some of the smaller steps to get to that bigger vision.

**Augustus Wood:**

Exactly, because you have to have those smaller steps, you know, there, there... to help you build more power, to learn more, to have those experiences, so that when you do get to that final big step, then you have you have you turned every corner, you've done every bit of reading, you've done every experience, you've you've done everything you can to prepare you for that final step.

So, so Dr. Mendenhall with with all the work you've been doing and a lot of these issues, you you have a lot of interventions... and it's a very, it's a very interdisciplinary approach that you have in the work you do, you know. You rely on history, you have sociological methods, you know, you look at psychology in relation to trauma, I mean, there's just so much embedded into the type of research you do. So can you tell us, how did you get started, what types of scholarship or scholars really influenced your early work? Like what were you doing to get to this point and develop your approach?

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

I would say, like so many Black female scholars and others who aren't scholars, Patricia Hill Collins with *Fighting Words*. And for me, just when she talks about control the images of Black women and write things that you could recognize from your own life, and then also when you talk to other women... and one example would be, um, when I was talking to a mother about her child who was in the hospital from osteomyelitis, um, there was mold in her house. And so all the kids got sick, one of them had to go to the hospital and she stayed with him at night in the hospital. In the morning, she got up and went to see about the other kids who were still at home. She was going back and forth and then, um, fell out. Did I did I talk about this earlier?

**Augustus Wood:**

No, you didn't.

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

Ok, yes. And then so she fell out and I said, well what happened? And she said the doctor said she was under stress and she said, um, I don't handle stress well. And you know how usually when you interview people you're like, yes, yes, ok, I understand. I see that. And when she said that, I was like, no, anybody's body would have given out under all that stress and pressure. And so, but it reminds me right of these controlling images that you as Black women, we often are, um, trained, socialized, to just take so much and to feel like we can handle it all. And then, like she said, if you give out, then it means you couldn't take stress well. So, um, so this this

book was really, um, informative, even the title, right, kind of “fighting words” and just kind of, um, the spirit and the energy that it takes to survive and even try to thrive and sometimes it is a fight. And so, um, I would say that's definitely one that I reach for over and over again.

**Augustus Wood:**

Yeah, I'd like that, I like that you brought up something that's really, been very critical of, that the the the strength myth, you know, and a lot of it is based on this weird, like, masculine patriotism that for Black women that, you know, the Black women were made to be strong and that they can take any type of oppression, they can fight off anything. You know, they're they're they're they're invincible in that manner, and the ones who don't they just they just didn't have the strength to do it. They're they're not they weren't they weren't worthy to carry it on. And I just always found that to be one of the most problematic things in relation to.... and I got that as well, because I'm a big fan of Patricia Hill Collins as well. And she talks a lot about it in her Black feminist theory work. Where, and then when I talked with some of my some of my colleagues, my Black female colleagues. Yeah. This is something that is a generational issue that there is this kind of I don't want to call it a mask, but there's this kind of pressure that's put on Black women that, because oppression is so insurmountable, that that that that that you have to be the one to take it all. You know, you have to be the ones who take care of the children and and keep the man strong and all these other ridiculous stereotypical garbage. And the problem with it is, particularly at the academic level, is that very few scholars seek to break that stuff down. They may call themselves supporters of Black women or or call womanists or feminist, but when you read their works, they don't they don't they keep those safe structures intact, though. So I'm glad you brought that up because I do think that is one of the most detrimental aspects to not just the past, but how we presently look at the difference in the types of oppression that Black women and men face and how different it is, right?

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

And even like you said, how it could look different in the academy, right? When it comes to, um, just kind of mentoring students and whose students come to, right, when often they are up against the oppression and racial microaggressions and old-fashioned racism in the academy and and just the emotional labor that's needed and, um, sometimes that Black women are often put in those positions.

And and you know, like, you know, people remember one time someone told me, um, you can't spend that much time with, you know, the students and get tenure. And I was like, wow. And I remember thinking for me though, that my, um, mentors and professors at Northwestern, that they really were kind of because right, I was in their offices and sometimes I needed that emotional care and support. And so it was hard for me not to do it because I've been in the spaces of students at P. W. I., predominantly white universities, right, where um sometimes the pressure is there and it's intense and you need somebody to say, I see you, you can make it, right? Um, some of this may be about you and some of it is just about social structures and oppression, right? So, yeah.

**Augustus Wood:**

And so, when you when you were doing your graduate work and you came across some of those experiences, what what what was, the what was the other types of uh of of what what was what were the other types of scholarship or people that you worked with that really kind of that

health and supported your your development and your intellectualism as you move along. Because again, as you mentioned, I just I think back to just myself and some of my other colleagues and you know, I'm sure you've heard me tell you just before that I was the only Black students for like three cohorts in my department and I had nobody who was doing African American history at all. So I couldn't connect with anybody on the scholarly level there. The only people I have were where you, Lou, Sundiata, and Helen, and that was it. I was literally on the island without, without you all. So, so so tell us about your experience, though. I know it's a lot different, me being a male. And so tell us about your experience though. Who you worked with, and who assisted, supported you.

### **Ruby Mendenhall:**

Yeah, so when I was at Northwestern, um, one of all, first of all the committee members, um, like their work was really influential from, um, Greg Duncan to Marjorie Togunhill. And then also, Phil Bowman and Carol were my two African American faculty that were on my committee, and Phil Bowman did research on role strain in Black men, right? And talked about, um just kind of how it's set up in society where men, right, are seen as the providers, and, um, if racism prevents them from kind of taking on that role, then there's role strain. And so, kind of talked about that and we did some of it as Black women, right, as um having role strain, too, in terms of the provider role strain. And then Carol Lee did a lot, um, I was really interested in Afrocentric schools and and actually when I first went to graduate school, I always wanted to start and run an Afrocentric school. So I was really into Carol Lee's work. And I, I really appreciate one of my instructors, she gave us an assignment early on when we started graduate school and it was to interview someone who's doing what you want to do in the future. And so of course, right? I kind of knocked on Carol Lee's door and asked her about an interview and I, um, it was so interesting, because as I was talking to her and asking questions, I was really asking like, can I be who you are, right, can I do what you're doing, right? And a Black female professor who was doing work around Afrocentric education and talking about the importance of the cultural wealth that we have as Black people. And and just the way, right, she responded. And and of course I didn't ask the question directly, but the response to me was like, yes, you can be there, the way she took me seriously. And so even now, when students, I'm talking to them back in the old days, right, we used to be in person and they're sitting across from me, and then they they they ask the question like, so how did you start? Like, how how did you, you know, start doing this, and in my head I'm like, oh, ok, they're asking the question like, can they do this, can they be me?

And then I I really stop and I'm there, was very intentional, and just kind of laying out my pathway because um that's what what what was done for me. So all that to say, I had a wonderful, amazing, um, dissertation committee and all of their work influenced me, but especially like Phil Bowman with his role strain and Carol Lee with Afrocentric schools.

### **Augustus Wood:**

Yes, um, it's good because that's something that I don't know, I don't know if you've ever told me that before, you may have a long time ago, but just hearing you say that that that you were interested in running an Afrocentric school, I mean it definitely shows in the things like when I read your work and I look at the stuff you've done. It shows that you have a very particular attention to how Black people live and wanting to improve their situations on an operational level. You know, I mentioned that earlier in the episode, but I do think that that is something that

we typically, especially for those of us who like to talk about structure and oppression and such and such, we can easily move away from the day to day or what I call the microstructural analysis, like the things you do with Black women and neighborhoods, communities, etcetera. And so to hear you talk about this and to see how, to see that development from those years to now and how you not only kept it, but you're stripping it. I think that's gonna that's gonna do a lot for people when they listen to this episode, the show, because I know, you know that, you know, a lot of people who go into graduate work or academia and they completely go do a 180 on what they're interested in. And so a lot of times it may be because of somebody moved them away from that interest.

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, well, yeah, I'll just say I um, there was a conversation where someone did try to move me away from it. I won't give the whole conversation, but, but yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Augustus Wood:**

Yeah, it happens a lot and you end up when you end up with people who they either leave the field and so there's this vacant space that somebody who doesn't have the best intentions may take, or, they, they're basically like zombies. They're just just going through the motions, check listing to get tenure, and then they're really just miserable.

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

Yeah, I'll tell you, yeah, one student, and and I loved it. Female Black student, um, we were doing, I think we were doing work with maybe the genomics project. And um she said, you know, I didn't know research could look like this. And I was like, I didn't know either, right. And what she was saying was kind of being at the intersection of kind of like the biology or either it's my big data project and then also deeply rooted in kind of Black culture and Black life. And so I know exactly what she meant because it was it took a lot of work for me to be in this space and to have research look like that. So, I know exactly what you're saying.

**Augustus Wood:**

Yes. And so, yeah, again I just I really appreciate that because, you know, I always emphasize this on a lot of these episodes that if we don't learn how to operationalize the things that we read or the or the intellectual debates, discussions, or the or the research that we produce, then we're just all we're doing is just publishing or putting something out there, but it's not being taken seriously or we're not taking this seriously. And then we continue on the same cycle. And, you know, I mean, it's no secret at this point that the big debate around the country now is the rise in violence, you know, and again, if throughout history, you've always seen this debate come up when the economic conditions have gotten have gotten worse and worse overtime and here we are currently now... with, we can guarantee that within 10 years scholars are gonna be calling this the second Great Depression because they're gonna have to change the metrics, that you can't just look at an unemployment rate that doesn't account for underemployment and discouraged workers, and all the other things that came about after the 1970s. To see that you now have two-mile, two-mile long food lines. You're having people who literally can't afford anything to live. And now the energy crisis has started. I mean there's just so much going on now to where your research and the kinds of, and the kinds of studies, the attention to the day



to day that we do is going to be so important if you're going to rectify a lot of these problems, you know?

So talk to the talk to us now about what are some what are some of the resources of studies that we can look at now that you've been using to kind of to kind of get at what's happening now with these crises that are just exploding all around us. You know, where are some places that people can go in terms of either books or websites or or even looking at your own personal stuff, like where can people go to get more information that's gonna help, help break down these issues.

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

Yeah. So one of them, um, is one of my colleagues who I admire so much with her work with Black women and, um, mindfulness and it's, um, Dr. Inger I. N. G. E. R. Burnett-Zeigler, and she has a recent book called *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen: Emotional Lives of Black Women*, right? And she kind of talks about some of the emotional pain, um, and even intergenerational trauma, but then also, um, resiliency as well. So I would definitely recommend that. Um, and I think for my own work, um, and I love Gus, when you talked about really trying to be on the ground looking, listening, seeing what people need, um, what things can prevent, like a big breakdown in terms of depression or other things, right?

As a country we have to start investing more in prevention versus putting a lot of money into intervention once things have gotten off the rail. And so, um, we're just now starting to launch a wellness store, and again, yep and again, kind of, um, embedded in, um, the culture of people, we're working with Black and Latinx high school students as part of the MacArthur, um, project that was funded to train community health workers. But the idea is that these community health workers are trusted members in the community. We'll work with them, kind of give them the latest, what we know in terms of neuroscience, in terms of trauma resiliency, but then they'll also help us to understand, like you said, what's happening on the ground, what are people struggling with, like you said, food insecurity, with violence.

Um, even before this really big kind of surge in violence, I was like, there's so much grief and loss in the Black community that we don't talk about. And that's when my work with the mothers, who, after years, who've lost adult children to gun violence, um, one mother said she was in the bed for four years and the only thing that got her out of the bed was that, um, she just had this realization that her son wouldn't want her to live like that. And then another mother talked about the pain of it feels like, um, someone ripped open her stomach, right? So she's living every day feeling like her stomach has been ripped open. And then another mom talked about this intense pain in her neck, where she feels like her son lives there. So what do you do with that, right? Like how do you help someone, um, with that kind of pain loss and trauma?

And that's kind of what the wellness store wants to get at, and what we hope our young people can help us uncover, especially for young people, right? So, rising, um, suicide among our Black youth with this totally unacceptable, totally unacceptable, um, with the gun violence, right, oppression, and um, just the intense trauma that they experience, um, it's often fueling some of the gun violence. And the research shows with jobs, with access to resources, that that decreases it.

So, the wellness store wants to think about, um, how do we capture those things that are healing, those things that foster wellness, and then create either low-tech tools or high-tech

tools, everything from, um, apps to, um, there's this clothing that I like that has writing on it, I'm thinking even quotes from your grandmother, or other quotes, and then maybe sensors inside. So, um, that's something that hopefully people will um, stay tuned for. We'll have a website kind of will have that information up for people to see as well. But we're hoping that it really is groundbreaking. And again, the solutions are coming from the community coming from individuals who are in the midst of those situations who are trying to survive and thrive, right? And, and again, it's a two-way exchange with the information.

**Augustus Wood:**

Exactly. I just, I mean when, when you do get to that point to where you're getting ready to open, we're definitely gonna have to have you back on to talk about that because because what this is, is something that I argue, in my work, that in terms of, if you're gonna have resources on the ground there have, there has to be a physical space for their mobilization, for their distribution, as well as their administration or a local movement center, and what you're proposing can serve as a basis for that. And when, you know, one of my arguments I make is that one of the most, one of the worst ways that racial racial oppression has manifested over the past 50 years has been the seizure of local movement centers that would, would mobilize and administrate a lot of the horrible stuff we see happening now.

So putting those back in the Black community are going to be crucial. And so yeah, this is, this sounds really amazing. This is the kind of thing that we need more people to hear about. So, yes. Oh no, good, wonderful. Um, before we, before we close out, where can people find out more about you though? Because because people always, they always email me and say, I want to know more about the speaker. I want to know more about the guests. So where can people, like, reach you or find out more stuff about you? There are some people who are big on social media, I'm not sure if you're into that or not, but I just want to give you the space so that if people want to reach out to be like, you know, hey, I want to read some more of your stuff or I want to know when you're you're presenting a paper or going to a conference, where can people, uh, learn more about your work and reach you?

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

Great question. Um, you know what really, if they just google, you know how they say google me, like if you google my name, like, it's a ton of stuff up there and I think someone even said when they type in Ruby, like just my stuff, not just myself, but my stuff pops up so I'm really easy to, um, kind of see some of the stuff that I've done, um, given a lot of talks. Just did one for the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland and then also with the Gold Foundation, um, there's some stuff online about that. Um, TED talk, there's a TEDx talk that I did. So, um that and and I, I'm on Twitter a little bit, I'm trying to do better, but I'm, yeah, don't even get me started, I'm barely trying to keep up with my email as many people who will listen will probably be like yeah, that's true. So...

**Augustus Wood:**

Hey, I do not blame you one bit. You should see the hate mail I get for not being on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, like I haven't done, I have none of those. I have Facebook but I don't check it, but I always get bashed for, you're doing all this stuff with podcasting and all this and yet you're not on social media, it's like, like, like you, I can't do all those things because it takes so much work with all that stuff.

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

Yeah, but I'm but I'm gonna try to do better, especially like you said, with launching the MacArthur project, the wellness store, and other things, and and I guess the young people, right? So, oh so they can also stay tuned because, um, the young people, as part of their citizen scientists, um, work, they're going to post things on Instagram. So, hopefully they'll be able to follow the project and hear um, what the young people are thinking, what they're seeing, what they're proposing, for solutions based on their interaction with the community. So, so they can hopefully stay tuned for the young people to put stuff on Instagram that, of course, you know, we'll check and monitor, but it will be their voices, their powerful voices coming through.

**Augustus Wood:**

Excellent, excellent. And so we are now coming to the end of an engaging, exciting episode of "Off the Shelf" with Dr. Ruby Mendenhall who's laying the groundwork for day-to-day, on-the-ground struggle in bettering the lives of Black people, specifically Black women going through the trauma of racial oppression, because that's exactly what we're talking about. This is more, this is kind of like what Ters Hunter wrote about and in her book on Atlanta, on southern Black women in Atlanta, and taking it to a more contemporary approach, and you're also operationalizing, getting like, no, we're going to actually build a center for these resources. This is this is so important, this is going to be very informational for our listeners. So I just want to thank you.

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

You're welcome. The center will be a physical space, but also online, right, again. So, um, and we're thinking the focus is kind of Black and brown communities' experience of oppression, but it will probably have implications for, you know, everybody, right? Just human health and wellness. But thank you so much for having me. It's been a pleasure talking with you.

**Augustus Wood:**

Thank you so much, Dr. Mendenhall, and thank you all for joining us for another episode of "Off the Shelf: Revolutionary Readings in Times of Crisis." And we want to say thank you to the Humanities Research Institute for the co-sponsorship, and we will see you all in the next episode. Power to the People.

**Ruby Mendenhall:**

Yes, thank you.