

Become A Good Ancestor Podcast

Ep01: Shoutin' In The Fire with Dante Stewart

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

book, people, dante, black, granddaddy, fire, writing, toni morrison, journey, stories, realise, james baldwin, shouting, writer, talk, world, read, reflection, life, ancestor

SPEAKERS

Speaker 2, Speaker 1, Dante, Layla

Speaker 1 00:04

Are you looking for wisdom, courage and guidance on your journey as a changemaker? Grab your headphones, a warm drink, and possibly a notebook, you're going to want to take notes. You found your new favourite podcast. Welcome to 'Become a Good Ancestor', a podcast hosted by Layla Saad. Layla is a New York Times and Sunday Times bestselling author, an international speaker and a globally respected teacher on the topics of race, identity, leadership, personal transformation, and social change. In each episode, Layla interviews some of the world's most inspiring authors of colour, who are changing the world with their words, from memoirs to manifestos, poetry, to pop culture, science, to social justice, and everything in between. Join Layla as she dives deep with BIPOC authors who are showing us the way to healing and liberation. This is a place for people who want to help change the world in honour of those who have come before us and in service to those who will come after we are gone.

Layla 01:19

Hello, everybody, and welcome back to what was 'Good Ancestor' podcast but is now 'Become a Good Ancestor' podcast. I'm here with

you. I'm your host Layla Saad. And this is Episode One of a brand-new adventure. If you're wondering what happened to 'Good Ancestor' podcast, this is an evolution. We're on the next step of this amazing journey of deepening the work of what it means to be a good ancestor. And so, we've gone through an amazing rebrand. And we're going through a relaunch of both the podcast and the book club. And you can find out all about it at our brand-new website, www.becomeagoodancestor.com. Now, I am really excited about all the new changes. But I want to reassure you that while a lot of things may have changed, a lot has also stayed the same. One of those most important things that have stayed the same is that this podcast and our book club is still about centring and celebrating incredible authors of colour who are changing the world with their words and their works. And so, each month we will continue to interview an amazing BIPOC author, like the one we have for you here today. And we will also be studying their book in the 'Become a Good Ancestor' book club. We'll close off each month with an amazing interview and event for our members in the book club where they will get to ask the author the questions that they have about the book about the author's journey, about the author's creative practices and about the challenges and successes and what it means to them to be a good ancestor. Now, now that we've talked to you about the rebrand, we've talked to you about the important changes that have been happening. I'm so excited to introduce our very first author who's joining us on this journey, and we couldn't have chosen a more perfect person to help us kick this off. Today I'm in conversation with the James Baldwin and Jesus Christ loving speaker and writer, Dante Stewart. Dante Stewart is an African American speaker and writer on the intersecting topics of race, religion and politics. He is a self-described country boy, who received his BA in Sociology from Clemson University, and is currently studying at the

Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, Dante's debut book 'Shoutin' In The Fire: An American Epistle', which is published by Convergent Vooks is our April 2022 books selection in the newly rebranded 'Become a Good Ancestor' book club. To find out more about the book and to join us in the book club visit www.becomeagoodancestor.com/bookclub. So welcome, Dante.

Dante 04:02

Yo, what's up, Layla, how are you?

Layla 04:06

I'm good and I'm so excited to be in a conversation with you. I have a huge internet crush on your Instagram page. And so, you know you're an incredible writer, incredible thinker and speaker and I'm so happy to have you here with us today.

Dante 04:21

Thank you I'm so excited to be as well are we going to tell people the story of the previous episode.

Layla 04:26

We might, we might tell people the story of that but before we do, I want to make sure people can grab your information and they can know straight away where to find you and find out more about your work and get your books so where can they find you online?

Dante 04:46

Yes, so you can go to my website www.dantecstewart.com. Or you can go to my social medias. They're all the same @StuartDanteC, slide in the DM's and I'll hit you back I usually try to go through the requests

and the messages and what not, trying to hit everybody back whenever I can. So, hit me up. I look forward to meeting you.

Layla 05:06

Amazing, amazing. Now Dante is giving you a little behind the scenes info about something that happened a couple of months ago, when we got ready to put up a new episode for the podcast at the beginning of 2021. Dante and I recorded an amazing podcast interview, speaking about his book and his journey. And right as we were about to finish up this incredible conversation, my whole system shut down. And we lost everything, we lost the whole conversation. And I was saying to Dante, first of all, I was mortified. And I know for podcasters, if this has happened to you, it's a really horrible experience. Another thing that happened to me years ago was I had another amazing conversation and realised at the end that I had forgotten to press record. And it happens to the best of us. You know, but I'm one of those people that when something like that happens, I take it as an opportunity to kind of step back and think about like, okay, this be for the best, and what opportunities are here. And so, with that, and I want to say a huge thank you to Dante because he was incredibly gracious. And he was like, "I'm ready whenever you want me back to record it". Again, this is no issue at all, which was a huge relief. Such a sweetheart.

Dante 06:08

Indeed, indeed

Layla 06:39

But from my perspective, I was like, this is an opportunity for me to really realign and really think about what I want to put out in 2021. I knew I wanted to speak with Dante again. But I also knew that we were

going through a transition. And so, we took that opportunity to, as I said, at the intro, to rebrand into relaunch, and to really align with the next steps in our journey. So, I'm incredibly grateful not only to be speaking with Dante, but also to be having him back on again, as he helps us to kind of give birth to this new launch and this new step in our journey. So, thank you, Dante.

Dante 07:17

You know it, I would do it a fourth time if it came to it. Hopefully, it doesn't come to it, a fourth time.

Layla 07:22

I believe it, I believe it. Honestly. But hopefully not. So, let's all cross our fingers for the ride. So, Dante, first question, who are some of the ancestors living or transitioned familial or societal who have influenced you on your journey?

Dante 07:40

Hmm. You know, I think the last time we talked, actually, my granddaddy was alive. I think my granddaddy was living.

Layla 07:49

Wow

Dante 07:50

When we talked and my granddad, he transitioned late January. And so, I think when I think about ancestors and elders who have become ancestors, the first name that comes to mind is my granddaddy, Johnny Reuben Albert. A few days after his funeral, we know this. I got so many stories from granddaddy, that I'm going to lean into, because

so much of this podcast, and so much of the work that you're doing, and so much of the work that we collectively want to do is at the place of our stories. I think Toni Morrison beautifully writes about that and take seriously the everyday ordinary ways black people create life and the power that is wrapped up in the way we live and move and have our being so the day of our grandfather's funeral. I am back home for the repass. And then I'm sitting down talking with one of his friends, Mr. Earl, old brother, who is a few years younger than my granddaddy. My granddaddy, mid 80s, mid to upper 80s, when he passed on, and we're sitting down and Mr. Earl says, 'I carry a copy of the Constitution everywhere I go.'

So, he has this very deep, heavy country voice about him. And he started telling me about how he carries the Constitution wherever he goes. And he goes on to talk about these people don't know what Critical Race Theory is. Yeah. He's one of those. He's one of those brothers, who is very much a militant, older, elder, militant black man. And he holds my hand and he sits me down as well as I mean, he's holding my hands. We're sitting down. And he tells me, 'Have you ever been on a cruise?' And I'll tell him, 'No, Mr. Earl haven't been on a cruise.'

And he says, 'You know, every time I go on a cruise, I stop whenever we stop, I look at the water.'

And I looked at him confused. I asked him why he says, 'Because somebody swam or drown there to get us here.'

And he says 'whenever you look at the water, when you look at these waters, remember. You look at yourself that somebody swam, and

somebody made it to the other side'. And I think about my granddaddy, who is not an ancestor. I mean, there are no words that can fully capture the beautiful reality of his life in a man who was born in 1930s, who seen the 1950s, who was in the military, in segregated barracks and side of the institution that love black people's bodies but did not care about their citizenship.

He remembers the 1970s in the 1960s, and the uprising, and him and Mr. Earl, both of them from the same area. They kind of grew up in the same way and became best friends. And both of them have this visceral memory of what it meant to be black in this country. And the estimation and worth or the devaluing of black life that this country has. But that's not all they contain. They contain so many of their memories, and so many of their stories, and even my granddaddy, he had dementia, late in the stages of dementia, he would repeat the same stories over and over and over again. And one day when I was talking to my mother, I was kind of complaining about it.

Layla 07:52

Wow

Dante 11:32

And she simply says, she said that 'sometimes, when dementia patients are repeating the same stories, all they're doing is holding on to what they remember'. Wow. And so, when I think about the ancestors that inspire me, I think about my granddaddy. And Mr. Earl, as he held my hand, he said, that is what I'm going to miss the most about your Granddaddy. And it was just simply talking about us sitting there telling stories. And so first of all, most I take for granted but then also, as people know, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison and James

Cone and Katie Cannon, who sit over my shoulder every single day that I come to my office, and I'm surrounded by books on theology, I'm surrounded by books on history, I'm surrounded by books on politics, I'm surrounded by books, that are fiction that are poetry, that are narratives that are theory, that short story, that being genre, and dance around Java, and I look at all these books, and I think what it means to sit underneath the tutelage and the eyesight, and the spirit of black theologians, womanist theologians, black writers, who, in very many ways, did not receive their flowers that they deserve when they were here. Now. So, as I think about while I remain, I want to do as best I can to let people not only know about them, and hear their story, but to lean into traditions that they have given us and have caused me to inherit. So, I've been thinking a lot about inheritance. You know, what do we inherit in our vocation? What do we hear in our stories? What do we inherit in our art and the many ways people want to erase us and take that inheritance away from us. And I look around this study, and I think about my ancestors. And I realised that, you know, I have a beautifully black inheritance. And that inheritance is my gifts that are offered to myself that are offered to my wife, that are offered to my friends, that are offered to my children, that are offered to the world. And I'll try and do it again and again every single day.

Layla 13:41

Oh, my goodness. That was several deep breaths there because that was beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing that. Thank you for sharing about your Granddaddy. And it's such an incredible reminder, we all know that we're going to die. And we talk about becoming ancestors, we talk about the ancestors, but it's always still a surprise and a shock and such a loss when it happens. But the way that you just spoke about him was so honouring, and so and so beautiful. So,

thank you for sharing that with us. And it's a reminder that, you know, when we are gone, the things that are remembered about us is how we were, it's our essence, our presence. That's what really lingers right in the memory that it's beautiful.

Dante 14:39

Oh, yeah. You know, you speak of essence and it reminds me of the sermon that my uncle did, the eulogy. And he is my granddaddy's son, his oldest son, who's also a pastor. He has to eulogise his father. And he's talking and he says this line, he says, 'I lost my daddy years ago who had dementia. You know, I lost my daddy years ago. But what remained was his essence.'

And I thought that that was brilliant, you know, and despite things that I thought was problematic about the eulogy, that I walked away with quite a few things. I still hold on to that, you know, it's just real. And I think he is very much right. And he beautifully stated that it is the essence of Granddaddy. It is how he made you feel in his presence. You know, Maya Angelou has the quote, 'people will forget, what you have done, but they will never forget how you have made them feel'. That's right. And so, it is the essence of our ancestors that still dwells with us. I think it was Thich Nhat Hanh, he says that our DNA, we look at ourselves and every fibre of our materiality is our ancestors looking at us emanating from our lives. And I think wow, you know, is that essence that when we tried to read something that Toni Morrison has wrote, as I've been writing this morning, I just finished up an essay on Morrison. Because me and Toni Morrison we share a birthday.

Layla 16:30

18th. When is it?

Dante 16:31

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The 18th

Layla 16:33

February, right?

Dante 16:34

Yes. Yeah.

Layla 16:35

Well, and Audrey Lorde, as well.

Dante 16:38

Audrey Lorde, is born on the 18th

Layla 16:40

Uh huh. I did not know that.

Dante 16:42

Yeah. Oh, I love Audrey Lorde.

Layla 16:46

Yeah

Dante 16:47

Wow, she was born on my birthday?

Layla 16:48

Because it was in my calendar actually, was on my calendar.

Dante 16:52

Oh, my goodness.

Layla 16:53

And my daughter was like, but she saw it, you know, I use my calendar for meetings. So, I had Audrey Lorde, Toni Morrison, and she's like, you're meeting them, but I thought they were dead. And I was like they are, it's their birthdays.

Dante 17:08

Wow.

Layla 17:09

And also, my youngest brother as well. So, it's

Dante 17:12

okay, that's a special day. That's a special special day. If you think about the essence that whenever I read something of Toni or read something of Audre Lorde and try to communicate in the ways that they did. Whether you're talking about Toni and her eulogising James Baldwin, and talking about the language he gave. The courage he embodied, the tenderness he exhibited, to so many of us or whether you're talking about, Audrey Lorde and 'Sister Outsider' and when she speaks of, you know, the black mother within us, the poet who tells us who whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore, I can be free. Whenever I go to the page, whenever we go to the page, whenever we go to their books, whenever we say their name, whenever we try to live out what they tried to live out, we are indeed embodying their essence, their

spirit, as you said, you know, still lingers and I am incredibly deeply grateful for that.

Layla 18:12

Wow. Shivers Shivers. Okay. I love it. Um, Dante, tell us a little before we talk about your book, which is our April selection for the book club. Tell us a little bit about your background, your upbringing and how you came to be a writer.

Dante 18:31

Oh, that's a great question. I am from South Carolina. I think you have a global audience.

Layla 18:39

Very much so.

Dante 18:40

Yeah, I am in America. I am in the South in the Southeast. I'm from South Carolina, which is the place historically speaking, where a lot of black people came during a time of the transatlantic slave trade. So, all my family is all up in through South Carolina. So, you meet a lot of black writers in general. I'm thinking about Jason Reynolds first. I think his essay might have been the first or second one of those in the book that Tarana Burke and Brene Browd did. Entitled 'You are your best thing' and he writes about South Carolina, or Robert Jones, his people, and my daddy are from the same area. Dillon, South Carolina. So, I'm from South Carolina. I was raised in rural South Carolina. So, I'm from the rural south. I'm from the black rural South, where so much of life was like intimate, beautiful, insular, where so much of the world that my granddaddy built, who built his own home, he had his own restaurant.

He was very much active in a community model family. It's just a very family-oriented area. You know, it's not a place where people you know, migrate to, it's a place people kind of migrate from and so whatever remains is kind of the vestiges of history, of culture, etc. So, I was raised black, Pentecostal black in rural South and raised black Pentecostal, where so much of church service was hours long multiple times a week. It was very expressive and evocative and emotive. And, so much of who I am as a person, like you would see me if I'm preaching or if I'm writing or if I'm speaking, there's a sort of type of cadence to the way that I speak. There's a certain type of voice that I have, my wife, often she jokes with me about this. She's like, 'Yo, there you go, using that voice again'. I be like, Babe, like, you know, when I was younger, when we when it's time to show up in the pulpit. You know, you gotta show up for the moment. And so, you got to change some things. You got to change the way you enunciate and my mom love using that word when I was a child is 'enunciation'. She would always tell me 'She cute,' she would say, 'Enunciate your words,' and she would not let me just say certain words, if I was saying, you know, 'hey, Dante, how you doing?' 'I'm doing good'. She wouldn't say 'no, you don't well? I'm well', she would always try to connect, change my language and make sure that I use the proper grammatical structure in language. My mom cared deeply about language, but my mother and my father, I'm the baby to baby of four, my brothers Dion. My brothers Bob and Dominique. I'm the baby of four. And my family, my mother, my father cared deeply about black literature. And so, my house was full of books, my house, our house was full of documentaries. Our house was also filled with so many artefacts, so I went home a few weeks ago. And, and I'll show you real quick, kind of lean away from the mic.

Layla 21:58

Yeah.

Dante 22:00

So this right here, listeners, you can't see this. I don't know if y'all may can see this or not.

Speaker 2 22:07

Um, we got video and audio. So, our video watchers can see it.

Dante 22:11

Cool. Cool. So, this is the Afro-American, right? This is dated November 30th, 1963.

Layla 22:21

Wow.

Dante 22:21

Afro-American was the black newspaper. This black newspaper is the Sunday edition of in commemoration and reflection on the murder of JFK. And this is the Sunday paper. And this paper was at my parents' house and there are many have saved.

Layla 22:40

Wow, yeah.

Dante 22:41

There are many things like this that travel through my family. I'm thinking of like Tia **mouse's(?)** all that she carried, and she has the family, the story of the sack and the family, and the story of like, love.

And the way I was raised, I was raised to cherish artefacts. There's something about the artefacts of our lives that hold both the terror and the testimony of what we have experienced and endured. And I went back home as well. I went to my grandparents' house, and my grandma called, my granddad has passed on I went to my grandparents' house, my grandma called me to the back, and she's got some stuff for you. I went back to the back room. Granddaddy clothes she like moves then manoeuvre. Then she goes, she pulls me over to the shelf. And on the shelf, she opens up a, an old plastic bag, and the old plastic bag is my granddaddy's journal.

Layla 22:44

WOW

Dante 22:53

And in this journal is like words, numbers, places, money, things meticulously documented, but then she pulls out another sheet of paper, and it is their marriage licence. And it says coloured on there. And I think about all of that, I think about the way I was raised. I think about that in just the beautiful part of that life. That I was raised in a black rural South and I had a beautiful, beautiful childhood, you know, is the thing to talk about like black life as a black life is terrible in and of itself. But I'm reminded of the brilliant Imani Perry and shout out to her for 'South to America'. Get that book if you haven't. Imani writes in Atlantic and she says racism is terrible blackness is not.

Layla 24:33

That's right.

Dante 24:33

Now there are terrible things that we do to one another. And there are terrible things that happened in my childhood that I still remember until the things that I had done or that was done to me. But when I look back on my childhood and the way I was raised, you know, whatever I took to Clemson University when I played football, whatever I took to California, whatever I took in marriage, whatever I took in back here to Augusta, Georgia, whatever I took when it came to what I do trying to communicate on the page. All of that is in some way back to using that language of lingering. All of that is some way, the lingering of the kind of stories that I want to conjure up that I want my life to be suffused with. I want it to be suffused with all the ways in which we have created life and built something of meaning. And so, much of my journey as a writer, how did I start writing was back in my childhood, my mother love books, and she would, she would make us write on them, she would have conversations about him, she would make sure we go visited the places that were in these certain books. And we're talking just yesterday. And my mother and my grandfather's funeral. She said, in reflection on granddaddy, she was like Daddy, I love my daddy. She said, Daddy, the first book that did he ever gave me was a book by Toni Morrison. And yesterday, I talked to my mama. I said, 'Mama, I know what book it was. I said it was Song of Solomon'. Mama say 'yes, that was the one'.

Layla 26:09

I love that book so much. Yes

Dante 26:11

Yes. Yes. When I think about my journey, being a writer, and becoming a writer, of course, it took me a while to get there. Because you know, so much of the way I was raised I distance myself from and, you know,

I destroyed so much in it. I mean, so much in me from it. That was definitely

Layla 26:30

yeah, we have some questions for you in this interview. Because you right, so authentically and vulnerably and honestly, about that process? Yeah, it's, it's so clear that the groundedness that you have as a writer today is from those links from your past, like it couldn't be severed.

Dante 26:43

Yeah, 100

Layla 26:55

And it's, and it's a beautiful foundation that your mother and your parents created for you. That is just, it's really unbreakable.

Dante 27:04

Yeah, well, 100, well, I would say it can be broken, but can be recovered. You know, things that are broken, can be salvaged and repaired. That's right, that ultimately destroy cannot.

Layla 27:24

Mm hmm.

Dante 27:25

You know, we can rebuild on those on those things and try and pick up the pieces of the ruins. And I think that may be part of it. You know, I think it is. So much of our journey is a part of that, like, things being broken in me, but finding ways to put it back together again.

Layla 27:42

Yeah

Dante 27:43

You know, my professor sent me in his office one day, and he's a brilliant person, Greg Ellison. We was talking about this award that he won, brilliant scholar won this award, one day was moving it, and it fell and shattered on the ground.

Layla 28:01

Oh, wow.

Dante 28:01

And he almost threw it away. But then he set this piece of artefact in front of me that day. And it was glued back together with the cracks still showing. And he said that this is a metaphor for so many of our lives. You get praise on one area, things get broken, and you find ways to put it back together again. But somehow the cracks are still showing to remind you of who you were and where you came from. So much of my journey as a writer is being broken, being cracked, but finding ways, black literature to work through revision as KSA Lehmann talks about to put those pieces back together again.

Layla 28:46

That's beautiful. That is such wisdom. Thank you. Okay, let's talk about your book 'Shouting Fire'. I would love for you to tell our listeners and our book club members about what it's about, and specifically, the title. So on page eight, you say, 'to believe in the better to believe in your future, to shout in the midst of a country on fire, to stare down the lions, to shake the foundations of the empire, to make meaning in the face of

death, to fail to create, to live and to love. This is the stuff of hope.' I'm wondering if you could tell us what the book is about where did this title come from? And who's shouting and what is the fire?

Dante 29:32

Huh, that's good. That's an incredible question. I think first and foremost, shouting into fire is a nod to just my deep love for James Baldwin and Jasmine Ward. James Baldwin writes to 'Fire Next Time'. And then Jasmine Ward, edited the book that features so many brilliant and beautiful black writers, contemporary black writers, and titled 'The Fire This Time' and new generation speaks on race. And there's so many essays, but there's just absolutely incredible and so beautiful. I mean, there's poetry there's narrative, there's essay, there's whatever, just so much in that book that's just so beautiful. And it's just like James Baldwin's book, 'The Fire Next Time'. So, much of 'Shouting in The Fire' the language is about James Baldwin and the ways in which Baldwin has helped me think about my own self. Because 'The Fire Next Time' if we read it, if we do a close reading of 'The Fire Next Time', it is first and foremost, an intimate reflection on black life, and black love, and black humanity. And then it secondly, it is kind of outward facing and him kind of preaching to the country, preaching to black people, preaching to white people, preaching to the failures of this 'democratic experience'. But in the first half, which is in reflection, on the 100 years since the Emancipation Proclamation, it is this intimate, very intimate conversation between him and his nephew, it's a letter to his nephew, where he talks about if we had not loved, none of us would have survived. And he tells his nephew that it was intended that you perish in that, whatever people call you to feel and make you endure is not a testament to your inter inferiority, but a reflection of their insecurity and fear, then he would go on to say, you know, that yo,

'we must accept them because they are our brothers'. And so, we got to figure out how a way how to live together. But remember, even as you're trying to figure out how to live, realise that you come from people, you come from somewhere, you come from people who have taking whatever we have been given in this country, and in our experience that we have made it black, but then he turns to letter from a region in my mind. And he does this very kind of philosophical, theological, social, political reflection on the church, on the country on the community. And he tries to navigate all of this experience in that last line, you know, that God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, but 'The Fire Next Time', it is almost as if like, he is writing into the future, he is writing into almost like Octavia Butler, when she writes for Essence magazine on a few rules for predicting the future. She says that, you know, 'I didn't create the problems that we are living with right now. But I took the problems of right now and I allow them I took the dangers of today and allow them to foster for 30 years and become the disasters of tomorrow'. Then the student asks her then what is what must we do? You know, what can we do? She says, there is no single answer, but there is, but you can become an answer, if you so choose to be. So when I think about 'Shouting into Fire', and its connection to James Baldwin in 'The Fire Next Time', it is, you know, my homage to the ways in which Baldwin went through that book has taught me how to live, love and accept myself, you know, because that's the struggle inside of a racist country, you know, and even being a young black man who was steeped in patriarchy, and misogyny and sexism, homophobia and transphobia, inside of this experience, that teaches us that socialises and disciples us into those type of frameworks and commitments. When I think about Baldwin in the way, he wants me to be better, 'Shouting in The Fire' is about how I'm not a hero, nor a villain, but I'm human. We're human, and we're worthy of

the deepest love, but that love must be, as KSA would always say, responsible love. It should be a love that tried to usher us out of our terrible theology, our toxic ways of being together are harmful ways of seeing ourselves and loving ourselves and loving others, and lean us into and help us take on better frameworks, take on better practices take on better and more healing understandings of our faith and of this country and what we have created. Shouting as a sound in the fire is a homage to that but shouting in the fire is so much more than that. When I think about the language of fire, oftentimes many people think that language about a fire is about destruction.

Layla 34:34

Right

Dante 34:34

Only kind of viewing Baldwin or Jasmine or even Ta-Nehisi when he writes around the Vanity Fair yet when he writes 'Between The World and Me', but also he wrote that joint in Vanity Fair called this is the fire or something like that. And things like that. When people think about the fire, they think only about the ways in which like black people are harmed and the ways in which we die. And when I think about myself, that is a limitation that I tried to lean into, and sometimes failed in my own work, that my ideas of the fire oftentimes did communicate just simply the ways in which we die or harmed. But it's so much more than that, as I've read and reread my book and tried to write more and revise the book and even my own work, you know, I realised the fire is about the ways in which we live is a reflection of the story in the Hebrew Bible, where the three Hebrew boys dance in the fire. It was so much about how this world or the political leaders, you know, tried to

destroy them. But it also was about that they were in the fire, but they were dancing, they were alive.

Layla 35:55

Right.

Dante 35:55

So to shout in the fire, and even I did this in the book, my book is not just death, death, death, death harm, harm, failure, failure, failure, it is so much about living in the tension of what it means to live inside places where you are both good and bad. You are both

Layla 36:17

everything in between

Dante 36:18

Beautiful to other people. Yeah, where you where you hold the tension in your own body, but like to shout, is to remember and to live in ways that we are alive and come alive. And so that's what it's about. It's about you, we, it's about how we are in love and alive and that we don't have to prove ourselves but that we are already enough when I'm talking about, going to Clemson University and being black on a white college campus or when I'm talking about the ways in which I see us die, but I as a black writer, and writing about that death with a sensitivity of the limited imaginations, about how people speak about Black Death voyeuristically. And so they want to explore our depth just for how they can be seen as not racist, or they can be seen as better how they can be seen as more educated, more this more that more this more that whatever ways they blame us, to harm us, or whatever ways people reduce our lives or our deaths to whatever they can gain.

I wrote with a particular sensitivity to trying to upset that narrative in very ordinary and powerful ways. You know, for shouting in a fire is about that is about looking at us but also being seen. You see Dante through the eyes of my wife. You see Dante through the eyes of Mikayla, you see Dante through the eyes of a young girl screaming, 'No justice, no peace', you see Dante, through the eyes of his children through the eyes of his sister through the eyes of his uncle through the eyes of his grandmother, through the eyes of his grandfather, and that Dante is not always the person you want to see or want to meet. But then by the time you get to the end, that Dante that you are left with is a person who tried to get better, and indeed did get better. And so, for me, I guess that's kind of the beginners. You know, talk about that. That's kind of beginners of like, it is why, yeah.

Layla 38:17

It is powerful. You just said so many nuggets within there that I'm like, I want to go find that. And I want to go read that. I'm going to capture some of these for our listeners. First of all, James Baldwin's books that James Baldwin's book 'The Fire Next Time' and Jasmine Woods, 'The Fire This Time' would be great companion pieces to read alongside Dante's book, because I think that it sounds like it would give you a really great understanding of the lineage from which you are from which you are writing from, and the energy and the culture. So those are great books to read alongside. I'm a huge Octavia Butler fan, so I love what you said about her answer, that you know, you can become the answer. And to me that really speaks to that quest, that that journey of being a good ancestor really seeing ourselves as I am here, I'm alive. And there are things that I can do and there are ways that I can live that can leave a legacy that can be an honouring of the people who came before us and that can be of service to the people who will

come after we're gone. I also really love what you said about the title of your book that you know, because when we first hear 'Shouting in the Fire' sounds like an emergency. Right? It sounds like some people need to be rescued. Right? It sounds like pain, it sounds like death. And that's there because that's the reality of living within the fire that is white supremacy and other systems of oppression. But I also love what you said about that fire can be viewed differently. Fire can be cleansing, fire can burn down so that the new can come through. And I'm thinking about with the shouting during the 2020, Black Lives Matter protests, you had the people screaming, No justice, no peace. But you also had people shouting, in celebration of blackness in celebration of unity, you had these moments of people breaking out into dance or proposing to their loved ones, right during these protests, like the shouting can look like so many different things. And so many of the black writers that you've referenced in this conversation, really remind us, right that our resistance doesn't always have to be something that is steeped in pain, like our resistance is liberation, and it can be joyful. And it's so interesting, Dante, because when I was writing my notes in preparation for this conversation, I actually wrote dancing in the fire and I hadn't realised it until I went back check my notes. And I'm like, no, no, that's not the title of it. It's called 'Shouting in the Fire'. But I had written it as dancing in the fire.

Dante 41:11

I mean, me but dancing, dancing and shouting is very much synonymous. Like when I think about my Pentecostal upbringing, that is, you know, my book is very much the feel of the black literary tradition of like, you know, KSA Lahmann, Jasmine Ward, Robert Jones, Ta-Nehisi feel, y'all. I mean, just these brilliant Southbroom Marvis colours, Ruffin, I mean, just these brilliant, brilliant, cadre just

brilliant, cadre of black writers. I'm even thinking about Darnell Moore, which my book would know ashes in the fire Darnell's book was so much of like, like so much of the book I went back to again and again and again, just the ways in which Darnell wrote with honesty and vulnerability, which I was trying to do. But then also, the book is very much a reflection of black Pentecostalism. I mean, there will be places where I did this as a craft, from a craft standpoint, where you have these almost like moments where like, you're getting lost in the, in the language, the tongues of the text, were like they're there, this language is at once dramatic, but piercing, it reminds you of so much you must remember, you know, even though you dance and your movement, moving, you're moving to a certain type of melody to a certain type of cadence to a certain type of rhythm. And so the cadence and the drama of the text. I'm thinking like the way I end the book, when like this, this last page is just like, over again and again and again, reminding you have themes and narratives that came before and it is almost like a sermon in that sense. It is a sermon without feeling like you're sermonising, somebody else. Like you're trying to win them like you're trying to get them now Baldwin said, you know, 'condemnation is easier than wonder'. And I want to be the type of person that wonders in around the text. And if that ain't dancing, that I don't know what is so maybe on the paperback edition, or something like the young readers edition. We can talk about dancing a little bit.

Layla 43:40

I love it. You shared about being broken. And you talked about your journey from your roots, your upbringing, the real rich cultural blackness that you were raised within. But like with all of us, right, we all go on this hero's journey where we leave the home and we grow up and we test and we try and explore ourselves and inform new identities

until we I mean, we're there's no end, right? The hero's journey, I think is an ongoing thing. But where you started from, to where you are now, the bit in the middle is quite a journey that you went, you went through. Talk to us about that. And I'm particularly I think, two of the stories that will always stay with me. In your book are the stories of DJ and the phone call to your mother when you told her that you were going to get baptised again. Yes, you felt that it hadn't done been done right the first time.

Dante 44:55

Yeah, 100. So you know I ain't gonna lie like that. The more I interview about my book, the less I like talking about that area.

Layla 45:03

I'm sure, I'm sure.

Dante 45:06

Like, and it's not even because now we're going to talk about it. Like we're gonna talk. Okay. But yeah, we're gonna talk about trust me. But I'm starting to realise like, the more and more I talk about that, the more I still feel it, you know?

Layla 45:26

Tell me more.

Dante 45:28

So like, even as people peak because people see it as a great story, but I feel it as a great boom.

Layla 45:35

Yes.

Dante 45:36

And so I feel

Layla 45:37

I read it, I read it as a wound, I read it as because, you know, do you know why? It's because even though when we write a story, we kind of we have to write it in a linear way that makes sense for a reader. The way we live as human beings isn't like that. And we can come back around again and again to old wounds, old narratives. And find, I thought that I dealt with that, but actually, it's still there. It's just showing up in this other way now. And the truth of the matter is we still live in a context of white supremacy. So no, right there is that trigger, that reminder is always going to be there. So I feel I feel you.

Dante 46:25

Yeah. And like, we write stuff, and we give it away. And like, sometimes people don't know how to read us. We give, we've tried to make sense of it as people. And we did make sense of it. And we wrote about it. And we didn't even write about the whole thing. Right? But like what people focus on is like, boom, boom, boom, boom.

Layla 46:49

Right?

Dante 46:50

Those moments, right, I was at an interview the other day, why did I tell the interviewer like, yo, 'let's move on', yo, you just trying to beat that too much, like this just feels weird? But I'll say, yes, we're gonna talk

about it. So long story short, when it comes with sound, I'll talk about a dude, those two stories. Yes. When I went to Clemson, I played football, the Clemson was in walking on soil and kind of American football language, you're good. But then like, you didn't get a scholarship, whatever happened, either that didn't have room or you didn't fit. So you go and you don't necessarily try out. But you go on and you kind of work your way up as probably the best way to describe it it's like you're trying to work your way up. And so that's what I did when I went to Clemson and end up playing some good football. But the thing is about, you know, young black athletes that oftentimes, when we go into these predominantly white institutions, whether we athletes, or whether we just black people in general and these white institutions, we feel that we have to become different people or have to reinvent ourselves in order for us to make it in these spaces. I was listening to Sonia Sanchez talking about Toni Morrison and 'The Pieces that I am'. And she had this, this line about reinvention, she says that, you know, when you say that, you're going to reinvent yourself, you don't like who you are. She says Toni Morrison wasn't concerned about your invention, she was concerned about reimagination. I think one of the challenges is that, when we go into these spaces, we're trying to destroy certain parts of ourselves to bring us, either, just normalcy, just to kind of exist in a different kind of social space without the kind of demands of where we come from, or we try and assimilate and gain power and privilege in this space. That was much different than where we came from, or, you know, we just kind of get caught up in the mix. And so like, for me, I was somebody who kind of got caught up in the mix where like, I knew where I came from, I was connected with my family, you know, I would always go back home every Sunday because I was playing drums back at my home church. But then little by little I stopped going home, I started going around white people more and

more. And then doing that, that came with the script that you are exceptional, that you are not like them, you are different. Now if that's one person in a kind of community of black people who know ourselves who love ourselves, we don't destroy ourselves. And that's not really gonna cause any rips, you know, but if you got multiple people like that, coming from the same places and going into the white space, and you kind of like cook like bringing them into the same spot, there's some clashes gonna happen and that's what happened with me and DJ. He was a young athlete who came in and he was great, incredible athlete and even to this day, I mean, he's an incredible person. He's incredible, an incredible person. But at that moment, instead of trusting him and loving him, especially knowing we both came from, the gutter, we both came from the places, you know that people didn't desire, I came from what people call the corridor of shame. He came from one of the most impoverished areas of Florida, you know, that's left behind. That's a migrant town of black people coming up from Haiti, as a very agriculture town looks like my town. And we get on these campuses, they give us all this opportunity to give us jerseys. They do this, they do that, they praise us. And we start to believe the press, we believe that we're different, we're special with this, with that, and, you know, we want to be the only black person at the top. And instead of realising that, there can be multiple of us at the top, I distrusted him and, you know, destroyed myself in the process. And so when he did me wrong, I write that this probably was the first time that I think I really hated somebody that was black, I utilise the language that white people used against us, against him, for me, he was a thug, he was way where I was the good one, you know, he was the bad one. He was the bad black person. Therefore, you know, I used that language as a weapon against him. And I didn't realise that in doing that, that would put me on a journey of utilising my blackness

as a weapon again, and again and again and again, not as a weapon to dismantle white supremacy, but to give it power. I started to begin to identify with black people, when it was about things that were wrong with us. I didn't identify with black people when it was things that was beautiful and worth celebrating among us. And that's kind of a test of anti-blackness. Whenever we are young, when we are black people we want to be the only black person in the room or whenever we only identify with black people, whenever it's something bad. And things like that. That's anti-blackness, we only think that blackness is something to be used rather than something to be loved and embraced and lived in. And so then fast forward years later, I'm in the white church. Me and my wife, Jasmine, we're married, and we're in California at this time. And then I call my mama and I'm convinced at this moment, I done read white theology, I done read their books. I've been disciplined by them, by them being in a church culture for a while now. And I was socialised differently. I wasn't like no Pentecostal preacher anymore. I still had, you know, my charisma and things like that. But so much of who I was, was a reflection of that space that I was in. And I call my mom and I'm like, yo, 'I'm getting baptised again'. And my mama lost it. And I didn't even realise, that so much of white supremacy and being black in a white space is about doing things that black people and not even being concerned about how much it hurts. And that's probably what makes me so sad about those various moments. Is that, when it came to my wife, and Mikayla telling me like, 'yo, you don't have a damn thing to offer black people'. Then I go home and tell this, tell this to my wife, and she was like, 'yo, you've been listening to you, you always listen to other people, when I've been telling you this to all the time'. It's like, you know, that white praise and celebration and white affirmation, turned me into somebody that was not just toxic, but dangerous. Somebody who was close enough to black people to

subvert us to harm us. And I think so much of my journey, in that moment, and in those moments, and even looking back at it right now. You know, so much of my change meant dealing with that person dealing with Dante in that moment. That's right, and being courageous enough to face myself. And to tell myself, you are not right, you are wrong. People are right about you. You are this person. And either you stay the same, and lose the people who matter most or change and lose the people who only want you around because of what you give to them? That's right. And I chose the latter. I chose I chose that courageous, hard, messy, terrifying process of changing.

Layla 54:32

I'm so glad you did. And I'm so thank you so much for thank you so much for sharing this and for writing it and I really honour you and thank you for I know, when you said this, I'm kind of tired of talking about this. I get it. I hear it and at the same time. I think there are so many black people and people of colour and people in marginalised identities who need to hear this, because this is something that we do to ourselves, and we don't even know that we're doing it. We don't even know that we're destroying our very essence, by participating in these in these systems and these dynamics. And so, the kind of having the having the courage to listen first, right? Because before we go and do the work, we then we have to actually sit with ourselves and like you said, with yourself and look in the mirror and be like, No, I am wrong, I am right. And the way that I'm behaving towards myself and towards my people, and the people who love me, isn't right. And I need to deal with that is such a huge undertaking, but it's so important. And what I, what I so appreciate and respect about you, Dante is that that comes through in the person that you are today, the work that you did, and continue to do comes through in the work that you did today, I

grabbed this post that you shared recently. On Instagram, I mean, I always want to share everything that you write, and I hear it in your voice as well, when I'm reading it, I'm reading it in your voice in my head. But you said black life is not about white racism, white apathy, or limited white imaginations. Our life is about our living, moving and having our being in what Kevin Quashie calls the black world, a world where we are complex, creative, fail, love, grow old, grow up, and get better. I love this so much facts on facts. Who, and I really want to encourage folks to buy the book, I now have it in both the hardcover, and I recently downloaded it on audiobook because I wanted to hear it as well.

Dante 56:55

Yeah, I think the audible is way better than the regular book. I ain't going to lie.

Speaker 2 57:00

Because you have this quality and this voice, right.

Dante 57:03

and I changed some things too, though. There were moments where I'm reading the manuscript, and I'm telling the producer, I'm kind of going to change that. So Right. You know, we stay closest to the system as possible. But like, there were parts where like, you know, why change your language? Cause like at that moment, you got so much distance between you and the manuscript and the tests.

Layla 57:28

Right? That's right.

Dante 57:29

and you go back, and it's not you reading it again, you haven't read the whole thing, you know, right in for,

Layla 57:35

like, I wish I hadn't read it like that. differently, right.

Dante 57:39

100, but then, like, I think the part I most enjoyed about the audio book was that I when I got to the acknowledgments there were so many people doing that moment, when I wrote the acknowledgement, like that. I'm like, damn, like, there was so many of y'all that that made me who I was. And I want to say your name. So I'm gonna start like, dropping names. There's not even in the acknowledgement, I was like, I was, I was driving all types of names. And then at that moment, I had become friends with people that were friends in the past when I finished it. And I just, I think the audio book is just the best thing. Yeah, and I feel everyone

Layla 58:18

should get the audio book, get the book,

Dante 58:22

you should get the audio book. Yes.

Layla 58:25

And if you want to discover more about the book and read it in community, discuss it with other people who are also book lovers and lifelong learners and people who are committed to healing and liberation, and particularly black liberation, where we're talking about

this book, but also just human dignity and humanities, join us in the 'Become a Good Ancestor' book club, because we will be reading this book this month, and we will get to have another conversation with Dante this time privately, where our members will have read your book, and they will get to ask you their own questions. I really want to encourage folks to join us for that. As we close up, I'm going to ask you two questions. And we're going to try and keep them as tight as possible. What do you hope people will take away from this book, like what is it you talk so much about the books and the authors who've had this huge impact on you and how you see yourself? What do you hope this book, your book, will have the impact that it will have on people?

Dante 59:29

Yeah, I hope number one that people, notice that I'm a part of a tradition. I want when people put my book on the shelf, I want it to be light or heavy, or men who read or Toni Morrison atonic cable or whatever

Layla 59:45

the prophets

Dante 59:46

Yeah, the prophets, I want it in those type of books, like, you know, want to be a part of that type of tradition of writing. So that's kind of the first thing. I think the second thing I want people to walk away from is like that we actually change the conditions that black people live in, by, we only have to write these books because our lives are still dealing with whatever we have to go through in this country. We write these stories because this was how we live. And I hope that when people

finish my book, I hope by the time you finished, you got some books to put in your library. But I also hope that, once you finish, you think differently, you change and things like that. And I know that's a tall order. And for me, like some people criticise my book for saying, I didn't like it, I didn't offer enough answers. And I'm like, okay, cool. You know, I mean, if you want to read it that way, didn't that's fine. You can read it, do whatever way you want. But like, my thing wasn't really to offer answers to questions that people have. You know, my thing was to invite people into a certain type of experience, like 'The Fire Next Time', there's not answering questions. That's right, like heavy answering questions like beloved, Solomon answering questions, the prophets answer questions. There, they're so in love with our black stories, they're inviting you into worlds, that's an event to dance and to explore. And that's what I want, I want people to change their direction and live and explore the black world. And that's probably my two biggest hopes.

Layla 1:01:24

I love that. And I will say with your book, and with your Instagram page, I feel like I'm in the black world, when I'm in your words. That is 100% the tradition that you're in, and it is you so mindfully, and intentionally create and nourish and sustain us in that world. So, I want to thank you for that. Thank you. Our final question, what does becoming a good ancestor mean to you?

Dante 1:01:56

Hmm, easy, you know, give those who come after us a better world than was given to us. James Baldwin, in in search of a majority, at the end of in search of a majority is writing about, the ways in which we live in the world. And he says, I don't even have to front, I pulled out

the book to make sure I said it. Right. He says that the world is before you, you need not take it or leave it the same way you found it when you came in. And I think for me, that's it, you know, you need not take the world and leave it the same way you found it when you came in. I mean, they're there so much. You know, there's so much this what's wrong with this world. But there's so many ways people have made it better. And I want to lean into what we have been given to make ourselves better, to make this world better. And I want us to make that better than inheritance. I want to awesome, make that inheritance better, and give it to the next generation better than we found.

Layla 1:03:11

That is beautiful. Dante, thank you so much. Thank you for your work, for your book, for your writings. And for this incredible conversation. I can't wait to be in conversation with you again, after we've read this in the book club. But I just want to say, I appreciate you and your words, your book is a form of nourishment for me and a form of remembrance of who I am and what it is that I'm here to do. Thank you so much.

Dante 1:03:38

Oh, thank you for having me on and to others at the end of every interview, to the many people who are going to be tapping into this podcast and who have been continuing to support especially in a pandemic, I do want to thank you, you know, we are in crucial moments continually, where we have to figure out how to create a community the best way we can. So many people are holding things and going through things. When you show up and you support and you engage your share, you build with one another. You know, that actually does matter. And I do want to say to each of you, I'm very proud of you, for the way you've been living these last few years. We've had a

lot, you know, going through but I'm very proud of you and I want to encourage you to keep on doing that and do a little bit more in 2022.

Layla 1:04:29

Thank you, Dante. Thank you, everybody.

Speaker 1 1:04:35

Thank you so much for listening. We hope you've enjoyed learning about today's author and their incredible work. If you enjoyed this episode, don't forget to subscribe to the podcast and leave us some love with a rating and review. You can find us wherever you get your podcasts, including YouTube. And of course, don't forget to buy the book we talked about today. We are on a mission to centre and celebrate BIPOC authors. And you can help us do that by sharing this episode and the book. You can join us in our book club to dive deeper into today's book, visit [becomeagoodancestor.com/book club](https://becomeagoodancestor.com/book-club) to find out more. For more inspiration and learning you can find us at www.becomeagoodancestor.com and [@becomeagoodancestor](https://www.instagram.com/becomeagoodancestor) on Instagram. Thank you for being on the journey with us as we strive to become good ancestors in honour of those who have come before us and in service to those who will come after we are gone.