

Become a Good Ancestor Podcast

Ep006 Patriarchy Blues with Frederick Joseph

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

book, people, patriarchy, Reema, ancestor, realise, space, conversations, person, bell hooks, exist, essay, writing, men, journey, white, unpacking, Frederick, literally, piece

SPEAKERS

Frederick, Reema, Layla

Layla 00:02

Hello everybody and welcome to Episode Six of the Become a Good Ancestor podcast. I am your host, Layla Saad, and this is the place where inner work meets social change. Today I'm speaking with marketer, activist, philosopher, philanthropist and two time New York Times bestselling author Frederick Joseph. Frederick is the bestselling author of the books, *The Black Friend* and *Patriarchy Blues*, which we'll be talking about today. And then his next book is called *Better Than We Found It* and that comes out in the fall. Frederick uses his writing and marketing skills to create change to help people grow and to foster learning and unlearning to uplift marginalised people. His second book, *Patriarchy Blues Reflections on Manhood*, which was published by Harper Perennial, is our August book club selection. In this thought-provoking collection of essays, poems, stories and short reflections, Frederick explores issues of masculinity and patriarchy, from both a personal and a cultural standpoint, from fatherhood and "Manning Up", to abuse in therapy, he fearlessly and thoughtfully tackles the complex realities of men's lives today, and their significance for society, lending his insights, specifically as a black man, to find out more about the book and to join us in the Book Club visit www.becomeagoodancestor.com/bookclub. Welcome, Frederick.

Frederick 01:45

Thanks for having me. I am excited and just ecstatic to be here.

Layla 01:52

We are so excited to speak with you today. I've been following you for a while on Instagram, you and three other black men whose work I really respect. Two of whom we've already had in the book club and podcast. Robert Jones Jr, who is our first ever book club, pick and Dante Stewart, who we've had this year as well. I'm waiting to get Joel Leon, and I've already told him. Once your book comes out, please let me know as I'm waiting. And then there's yourself. The four of you actually just did a wonderful life that I got to watch the replay of for Upworthy. It's my deep pleasure to have you here on the podcast.

Frederick 02:35

Yeah, it's funny, I have a group chat with three of them. You know, they're all my brothers, phenomenal thinkers, phenomenal writers, and more importantly, just phenomenal men who are working diligently to get better every day. So, it's an honour to be in the space that they've been in.

Layla 02:56

Absolutely. It's our honour to have you, to have all of you. So, before we dive in, let's let people know where they can find you and your work online.

Frederick 03:07

Yeah, people can find me @FredTJoseph on Instagram and Twitter. I recently started using TikTok and so forth. The folks who were into that too, please follow me there. I am not good at it though. So just beware.

Layla 03:25

Fantastic. Our very first question is, who are some of the ancestors living or transitioned familial or societal? Who has influenced you on your journey?

Frederick 03:39

There are just so many. First and foremost, I have to bring my grandmother into this space. My grandmother. There are not enough words for me to say about her. She's the person who inspires me daily as a writer, as a human, as a family member, someone who I watched struggle and have nothing most of her life sadly, and yet somehow find time to give everything. She's the first person I think of and then, I think from a writing sense thinking of ancestors. There's obviously Toni Morrison and James Baldwin. But right now, I think my heart sings the songs of Bell Hooks. My heart sings many songs, but right now, Bell Hooks rings especially true, I think, not just with the work that I tried to do in *Patriarchy Blues*, but the work I'm trying to do in general. I think Bell Hooks should be an ancestor on everyone's mind, especially as we are navigating these treacherous waters of patriarchy in its manifestations happening right now with this supreme court decision in America.

Layla 05:01

Absolutely. Thank you for sharing those. It's funny actually, as I was preparing for this interview, and thinking about some of the questions that I wanted to ask you Bell Hooks really came forward for me as well. Let's start first with page 11 of your book, your definition of patriarchy. I want to read that out first, just to make it clear for people that when we're using this term patriarchy, what is it that we mean, but also it brought to mind Bell Hooks and the ways she named this white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, hetero-normative society. Your definition of patriarchy is *"the emotional, physical, mental, metaphysical, political, social, and economic manifestation of the false belief and oppressive ideology that individuals and groups aligned with what is subjectively deemed to be femininity and or womanhood are inferior or are of lesser value than the subjective opposite, i.e., masculinity and or manhood."* Now you go deeper into this explanation in the book, but I wanted to kick us off of this, the subjectivity of womanhood and femininity and the subjectivity of masculinity and manhood. And it made me as I was reading your book, I was thinking about my own kind of burgeoning understanding of patriarchy, because my earliest childhood experiences of difference and discrimination were not for me,

as myself, as a girl, right? They were for me and myself as a black person. And it really wasn't until I was an adult that I began to think critically about and understand what it meant to be a woman in a world that views women as "inferior" or of lesser value. I didn't have a book like yours, but let's say 2015, so not even that long ago. But in 2015, the available books were primarily from white women. They were the ones that I could see naming this thing called patriarchy. But they were naming it in a very specific way. It really was a white male patriarchy. And it really didn't. It really was about women as a whole, but really white women, being only at the hands, at the harm end of patriarchy, and not being participants in it as well. And in my reading and deepening, and as I began to come across writers such as Bell Hooks, and began to get a more complex understanding, I began to understand myself better, as well as a black woman who is experiencing the intersections of racism and sexism. And so those books by black women writers were really important to me. But when I came across your book, I got an even further layer. Because I don't know that maybe there are out there, but I don't know of another book by a black male author that explores patriarchy, and all of its many nuances. So, this is what I'm trying to ask you. What is *Patriarchy Blues* about? And why did you write it? Because this book doesn't exist anywhere?

Frederick 09:02

You know, it's interesting. I think you kind of answered the question. For me, I think working backwards. My personality, not just as a writer, but just as a person, is to fill the gaps that exist. That's just for better or for worse, you know my partner tells me all the time, you might not be able to fix that and even sometimes when we talk, she's like, I don't necessarily want you to fix it as much as I want you to hear me. And that's something that I'm working on and navigating myself because I'm always trying to fix something. I think when I was on the same journey as you right, like unpacking, not just patriarchy, but white supremacy, there were just books that didn't exist. And I think with both my books when I first began, this doesn't exist, right? I think, and I don't because I don't like to saturate a market or a space if something's there. I think, for example, the Young Adult (YA) version of your book. We didn't have that. We didn't have that when I was growing up. I couldn't really speak to like, oh, this is, you know, I couldn't speak to any of that. So even when I wrote my first YA book, it was like, oh; we don't have this. So, *Patriarchy Blues* was my way of creating something that didn't exist. But also, being the messenger that some people might be willing to listen to, because of the existence of the things I'm talking about in the book. Like, what does it look like to not have a white woman writing about white mainstream feminism? Because a lot of times, everything else is lost in that conversation. Then inherently still upholding white patriarchal systems. And then what does it also look like to have the person not necessarily even be a black woman? Because black men are not always inclined, sadly, to listen to black men. What does it look like for me to write this book as a black cis man, and then say, hey, and these are some of the people I learned from, please go learn from these black women now. The book is a journey towards something greater. And in terms of what the books are about. I think the book is about the fact that we are all implicated in our own ways of upholding patriarchy. As opposed to saying, and that's that long, convoluted definition that I gave because it needs to be right. This is not just to be really transparent. I think one of these is not white mainstream feminism. I think the issue you see even now, with conversations about bodily autonomy, they don't extend in a white feminist lens to trans people as an example, right? Like people will say, oh, don't use birthing people, so on and so forth. Because you want to be exclusive because you're not interested necessarily in equity, you're interested in power. What does it look like for us to not be interested in power, but to be interested in equity?

Because if you're interested in equity, then you have to look at everyone who's harmed. Not just the people who are harmed who you ultimately want to have power.

Layla 12:07

You speak to something that I really enjoyed about this book. And it was a kind of, to be honest, I'm not sure what I expected. When I opened the book, do you know what I mean? Like, exist, so I wasn't sure what I was expecting. The main thrust of the conversation to be, and what I think was really unexpected for me was that although you do share your own experiences, many of which were very heavy, you also offer different perspectives of people who are often left out of the conversations, when we're talking about patriarchy, and the ways that it impacts them, or the ways that they may be complicit in it. And so, when you move from essay to story to letter as your book is very lyrical. You never know what's coming next, you know, is it going to be a poem? Is it going to be a letter, is it, and whose story is going to be told next? Or where's Frederick shining the spotlight for us? So, we can have a piece that's on your relationship with your mother and how she taught you how to fight and how that impacted you as you became a man. But then you also have a piece on decriminalising sex work. This is a breadth of touch points for us to really consider and understand the ways in which patriarchy is not just white men, or even just men doing things to women. Cis het men doing things to cis het women. But really, it's so broad. And so, I'm interested to know about your kind of journey of gathering, because this is an understanding. These are lessons that you must have learned along the way. And I'm wondering if you can tell us a little bit about that how these different pieces came to you, especially those that are not your direct experiences?

Frederick 14:20

I mean, being in the community. I think that far too often is one reason why I have issues with certain books that are talking about racism. I don't think that you always have to experience everything to defend a community or to shine a light on the community, but you shouldn't be talking over that community. And also, you have to actually be in proximity and within that community often, so when I'm talking about, like my theory of change in this book. If I do have a centre of my theory of change, it is black trans women. If there's, I think I start the book out with them. But not because I've read about them or been on Twitter or Instagram and actually love them. I have black trans women in my life who are some of the closest people to me, people who I have cried with, and I have laughed with. I've been to the beach with them. These are people who will be in my future children's lives. It's not the same as how other people do it. What I tried to accomplish in this book was almost like a case of support. A case for being heard. I can't speak for black trans women in this nation or globally. But I can ask others to listen and make a case for that listening. That's what I tried to do. I think that a lot of lessons that I learned in writing *Patriarchy Blues*, and how I wanted to try to accomplish that, quite frankly, was just not being and doing what I had seen a lot of white authors do around race. I did not want to do that. When I think about this space, even let's say anti-racism work. I think about your book and your book and Ibram and I think about Jason, and I think about myself and just and the myriad of people doing the work. I wonder to myself, like how many of those people have, let's say Robin D'Angelo been at like a conference and said, hey, I don't need to show up. This is this conference, you need, you need to send one of them right. Or on the back of my first book, I have a whole list of books that people should read on race because it's not just about me. Because I've seen how painful it is, literally, I am scratching and clawing for people to buy *Patriarchy Blues* and support it in any capacity. It's not really getting the

support that we would like it to get and that's okay. But it would take one white woman who's talking over people to change the entire course of this book. If I'm feeling like that, and I do have privilege, then what are people feeling like in a hierarchical society who have even less privileged than me? I've tried to do this thing where I'm like, hey, I'm not going to talk over you. I'm not going to take up your space, I'm going to simply try to use my power if you would, in writing and platform to create more space.

Layla 17:34

Yeah, thank you for sharing that. And I really felt that I was, I think I was trying to find like, as a man, like writing about patriarchy, I think I had a super lens because I was looking for, how is he? I want to give you context for this oftentimes. This wasn't a suspicion of you, Frederick, as a person. But oftentimes, when I see myself when I have been in spaces, where there have been men who are self-identified feminists, oftentimes, I've seen that they have been able to cause the most harm because they are, they know how to use the right language. They know how to say the right things. They know how to project a certain image. But they, in the same way, that white people who feel that they're in the work with racism will kind of say, well, I get a pass, because I'm not like those other white people. That can happen with men as well as it relates to patriarchy. I think I had a super lens going in because I wanted to know, where's it going to take this? How is it going to take this? What I really loved and respected about your book was that first of all, you really went there with telling your own personal stories, and you really kind of indicted yourself, like this wasn't the problem out in the world with toxic masculinity. No, it was. This is my journey with this. These are the lessons I've had to learn. These are the ways that it shaped me. And it wasn't even like, and now I'm better, right? Like it was. And now I'm still on the journey, right? But I really respected the ways that you were highlighting as you said, people who have even lesser privileges than you without it feeling like you were trying to speak for them, or that you were trying to or that you were unwittingly being condescending, it felt super respectful. There was a lot of care and intentionality that went into the ways that you crafted those pieces. And it sounds like, and I guess I'm trying to confirm this, but it sounds like you had people who were able to hold you accountable. We're like these stories. These are things we want to make sure right.

Frederick 19:59

Absolutely, I think the first thing is, when you're trying to create space for a community, you shouldn't be doing it because you're trying to gain power and capital. You should do it because you love the community. And when you love a community, you do everything that you can to protect the community in a way that even means protecting the community from yourself. I feel like again, and I hate to just kind of come back to this. I really did learn lessons from like, white feminist authors of the like, what I didn't want to do. And in that, I don't even call myself a feminist. I guess if I was someone. I don't call myself a feminist. You know, in the upcoming book *Better We Found It*, which is another YA book. I write the chapter on feminism in that book. So, the book is about gun violence and feminism and the military-industrial complex and transphobia of all these different things. But I write the chapter on feminism not because I know more than my partner who co-wrote the book with me. But because we say this is, I'm making a case for why men need to be in progress in this work. And that's what I am. I'm in progress. I will be in progress till the day I die. I mean, transparently. Me and my fiancé, we just got through an argument 15 minutes ago before I jumped on this thing, and part of it was that she's biracial, and we're unpacking her real feelings around patriarchy in society. And learned in our early relationship, I'm unpacking white supremacy, and how as a fair-skinned biracial woman, how that manifests in our

relationships. We do the work regularly. She wouldn't call herself a race expert. I wouldn't call myself an expert in feminism. We are literally just trying to do the work. And if I can get other people to do the work, and beyond the journey, then that is great for me, I am not those guys, like not even just those guys, those people who self-proclaim themselves things, you're not really it, then I will. I will die in the progress of trying to be an intersectional feminist.

Layla 20:37

No, you didn't, actually.

Layla 22:06

I love that. Thank you for sharing that. What do you think about conversations that men have with each other about patriarchy? What needs to happen in those conversations?

Frederick 22:23

I think two things; I think accountability and love. Because I think that when you lead with love, within spaces of people, with people you actually do love, it makes way for the accountability to be taken in a way where change can happen. So, again, I mentioned this earlier, having my group chat with Dante, Joelle and Robert and have a few other people who are in there. They're all black, it's all black men. And there are times when we just fight like we're literally sending each other voicemails. I was like; I saw what you said on this, didn't like it because of this. And I'm like, well, bro, you didn't think of it this way. But that is literally the work that we need to be doing with each other because we're talking about everything. We're talking about how we relate to black women; we're talking about how we relate to white feminism, how we relate to the publishing space, how we relate to each other as platform people and all these different things. If I said something on here, that let's say Robert duck wasn't great. Robert will tell me with love. You need to do better. But those are the conversations that we need to have. And I think that globally, two things are not true right now, maybe more than ever, that you can care about somebody and also hold somebody accountable. We're not making enough space for that existence, where it's like, bring me in out of love. Like, bring me in out of love, I don't do like every space. Like that's why I was deeply appreciative, appreciative of you all creating this space and allowing me to be in here, but I trust you. I said that earlier on, when we were behind the scenes, I said, hey, ask me whatever you like, because I trust you. After all, I feel the love and the space. And also, I know what you're about. We need more of that.

Layla 24:17

Yeah. You know, as you're sharing that, about the group chat and the dynamics there and I think about my own kind of conversations with my inner circle, my trust crew and, what it is that makes it so that when they do say, you know, this isn't okay, or you may want to look at this, that I'm able to stay in the room. They're not coming from me, they're not, you know, they're doing it. They're saying this out of love and that takes time to build those relationships and build, build that trust and build the feeling that it's safe to be vulnerable here. You talk about it in your book, so many, and I've alluded to it a number of times, but I don't want to give everything away. I want people to love and read it with us. But there are so many personal stories that you share of times when, like, you had an interest in things that just took your heart. And then other people would say, well, that's soft, or that's not what boys do, or that's not okay, you were like, okay, I'm not going to do that anymore, I'm not going to do it like that, or I'm going

to try and mask it in some way. And I was reading the book, I kept thinking of my children because I have a boy and a girl. And they are unique individuals as every human being is. And as they're growing up, I'm so trying to be so careful with the language about how we say, what is for whom and what isn't right. And so, there are things I'll catch them up really quickly. But I also have a lot of fear for them as a mother, because they're growing up in a different society than I did with social media, with all of that, and you talk about social media in your book. What advice do you have, I guess, for parents, and people who are caregivers who want to raise children who are aware of what the patriarchy is, and who are not complicit in it and allowing kids to be free, you know, the kind of freedom that you wish you'd had growing up that I wish I'd had growing up?

Frederick 26:35

Yeah, first and foremost, my favourite space that exists in this world are spaces in which, or spaces that exist in this world are spaces in which I get to talk about young people, that's my favourite writing, I think that it's the most important writing also, in my personal opinion, but for parents, I would say, believe that you know, nothing, right? Like, believe you literally know nothing, because all of us as people, we have all of this unpacking to do, all this navigating to do, even like when we look at the anti-racist movement that really blew up in the summer of 2020. I said, one of the failures of the movement is that not enough people of colour and black people specifically are able to do the work, we're not being put in spaces to also do certain readings and things like that, because we have to realise, we have been indoctrinated, internalised, so on and so forth. And this happens to everybody, happens to women with patriarchy, black and brown people of white supremacy, and it happens to parents with the generational traumas and failures that we're bringing into spaces with these kids. Think that you know nothing and be prepared to relearn, and sometimes learn from your children. You know, literally learn from your children. I talk to young people all the time, weekly, who are educating their parents on these things. So, I am a big proponent, a major proponent of meetings of the minds of young people. Actually, treating young people like people, meet them and create space for you both to grow, as you were trying to teach them. What lessons can you learn from being their parent?

Layla 28:24

Wow, I love that so much. Because yes, my kids teach me a lot. And a lot of times, I'm like, how do you even know this? Where's this coming from? Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I love that so much.

Frederick 28:40

If I may add. Sorry, my apologies.

Layla 28:43

Go ahead.

Frederick 28:43

I think I forgot to add this one. But I think that that's especially true, with the current moment we're in because they are seeing so much, they are seeing so much with social media. With global communication, they're literally seeing more than we ever did, ever, they're seeing more than we ever did. So, you have to go into expectation; you have to see or you have to expect that you're going into conversations that you might not know everything about right. Like you might literally be adding to

something as opposed to building something new. Like you might be more transphobic, let's say, than your daughter, who's in a class with five trans classmates. So, you might be teaching empathy, but you're not necessarily teaching trans, what it looks like being a trans ally. They might be teaching you how to be a trans ally while you're also teaching empathy. Like and all these different things are happening at the same time. I just wanted to add that in there just to give context.

Layla 29:45

Absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you for sharing that. I do think that each generation has its work to do, and each generation passes the baton on to the next one. And as we go through each one, you're like the one that comes before will have still some hang-ups from the generation that came before them. But those that come afterwards are, in a lot of ways, their perspective very different. And so, we have to learn from them. Before I ask a final question, I'm going to bring on Reema Zaman, who's our book club facilitator, but I wanted to shift the conversation a little bit. Because *Patriarchy Blues* is an incredible, incredible book. It's one that it is heavy, I will say that, and I mean that in the sense of its one that makes that it almost, it's softened me. It softened me because as I read each piece; I heard a story or a perspective, or read a letter that just broke me open. And it showed me more humanity, and the thing about humanity, and we talk a lot about reclaiming our humanity and living in the dignity of our humanity. But the thing about humanity is that it's messy. And there is a lot of depth and heaviness and trauma and pain and grief. And what I really appreciate about your book is that it tells the truth, but it also is leading us to a better way forward. It's kind of it was showing us, this is the impact of what can happen if you treat a child like this. Or if you expect these things from certain people, or if you deny people's certain things, this is what can happen. And so, what is a better way? But when I finished reading it, I was preparing for the interview. So, I went and Googled; I want to type your name into YouTube because I'm a visual person. And because I'd found your work through social media, through your posts, I hadn't realised I hadn't made the link that you were the person who started the Black Panther Challenge. And so, when I saw I was so happy, like, I can't even tell that that movie gave me so much joy. Like I saw it six times in the cinema, sometimes by myself, sometimes with my daughter, and my husband, but a lot of the time by myself, it's a movie I can watch again and again. And again. You started the Black Panther challenge and then you also started the challenge of my other favourite Marvel movie, which is the Captain Marvel challenge as well. Again, I can watch that movie a million times. So, you made it so that young black and brown kids and kids from underrepresented under-resourced areas could go into the movies and watch these incredible stories. And I just want to say thank you, like the little girl inside of me is so joyful that you did that. But also like the juxtaposition of the heaviness and the truth and the like, heart-like wrenchingness of *Patriarchy Blues*, but also the joy and the like the ecstasy of that work. And I realised that's Fred. He's all of that together. Yeah, so I just wanted to name that because I walked in, I finished the book, and I was like, this is a lot and I Googled you and I'm like, this guy wrote it.

Frederick 33:36

I appreciate it, it's almost an emotional thing because that's part of why. In the book, I wrote the letter to Chadwick. Chadwick and I, through the Black Panther challenge, actually had become cool. And his wife, Simone. She's just a kind person. I actually had sent her the book and that specific essay to him beforehand and asked for approval. I think that black people, oftentimes; we don't really get the space to be dynamic in the imaginations of other people. So I do love it when people find that out. They're just

like, wait, you're well, besides doing that you're a geek right there. I think because of the nature of what I talk about, what you talk about would always remain separate. I would never necessarily know that my being on your page is listed like you saw Black Panther six times, but we are that we are so dynamic as human beings, and, but I am excited to say, it's not public yet, but you know, whatever.

Frederick 34:52

It is now. So now for Black Panther 2 Marvel Studios, actually, have me write the picture book for it.

Layla 34:54

That's amazing. Oh my gosh.

Layla 34:54

It is now.

Frederick 35:01

Yeah, they had me write the picture book, and they didn't realise when I was doing all of this. They were like oh, he writes, you know, and then, later on, I became a New York Times bestseller. Wait, wait, what? So I wrote the picture book, and I specifically got to do something that I can't say what it is, but I got to do the book it exists in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Whatever story I have told, and whatever it's about, exists in Black Panther and Ironman and so on and so forth. And I'll make sure to get you a copy.

Layla 35:39

Please do, because...

Frederick 35:43

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'll make sure to give you a copy.

Layla 35:45

Thank you so much. Oh, my goodness. I'm like, googling you and seeing you on the couch with Chadwick Boseman. I don't like fan girl over celebrities very much. I think Beyonce is the only person that I'm like, yeah, okay. But Chadwick Boseman was that for me and when he passed, that was really hard for me. And for so many of us, for so many different reasons. And so, to see your tribute to him, and to know that this legacy is continuing, as well, it's just so beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing that with us.

Frederick 36:22

Yeah, well, thank you for bringing it up. And for bringing Chadwick into this space. I think. If I change the subject, I can.

Layla 36:33

Wakanda forever. Yes.

Frederick 36:34

Wakanda Forever. Wakanda Forever.

Layla 36:38

All right. I'm going to bring in our book club facilitator, Reema Zaman. Now, she's going to ask you some questions. So Reema leads our book club discussions in The Good Ancestor book club. She is an author herself, and she's a very thoughtful, intentional, and generous person and I love the discussions that she hosts in the book club.

Frederick 37:27

So, while we wait for Reema to come on, we've been playing with the idea of the four of us having a podcast one day because we feel like there are so many toxic black men with platforms and podcasts. And I'm just like you, legitimately. If we do that, you have to be the first person ever on there. And just like you would enforce that, you have to be the first person.

Reema 37:53

No, are you serious?

Frederick 37:56

I'm sitting here. I'm just like, oh, we have to make this happen. Like we literally...

Layla 38:01

Oh, my gosh, you don't know how much that would mean to me. I actually, I don't even know the four of you personally. But each one of you. I'm like, that's my brother. You know, I'm like, that's my brother. That's my cousin. That's like I know them.

Frederick 38:16

We are

Layla 38:17

We're family

Frederick 38:18

Yeah, we're family. I think we underestimate sometimes. How much we actually all do. I think social media, social media, things like that. But I feel we underestimate how much we know each other. How much of a sense of love actually is there. And I think we shouldn't do that. Because now I'm like, oh, when Black Panther 2 comes out, for example. I'm like, oh, we might have to talk you into coming to the States or something. I don't know how. We got to figure something out. Like you, and your partner and the kids. Yeah, y'all. Also, I just want to be around the four of you. Because you're all adorable. Pictures of just like, aww.

Layla 39:08

We're about to go on holiday. You're about to see all of our holiday pictures. Because when we travel, I'm like you guys are seeing everything. You're seeing all the places we go.

Reema 40:32

Hi, thank you so much, Layla. And thank you, Fred. It's been an honour and privilege to listen to you both speak about this. And I'm glad that you segwayed into Black Panther and joy because I had started crying, listening to a lot of what you were sharing. And your book moved me so deeply. And, you know, if so many men in the world hadn't been taught to reject love or believe that love and vulnerability means the abandonment of self for independence, and making them push away, their families, their loved ones, their lovers, the world would be a much kinder place. However, both your books gave me so much more empathy for the harm caused, and those men who then are taught that harm and because of you, you let us see. And you let us learn that it's because love was rejected from them, or someone taught them that love is the abandonment of self. And that's why they then push away love in return. And so, we're all hurting. This also means if we're hurting from the same things, that also means we can heal together, which I think is one of the most powerful lessons from your book. If we are able to buy the same system, then surely we can heal together through connecting and finding empathy in our connected pain. So that's why I was crying. And I'm so glad you guys stick it into Black Panther. That's a challenge to be like.

Frederick 42:30

Did the two of you want me to cry on here today?

Reema 42:32

Yeah, well, we can say that for our Fireside Chat. That's usually when the authors start crying. So, I'm conscious of our time as well. So, I have two questions for you. And I wanted to ask first, your essays are so profound and so powerful. Each one is a showstopper. I want to ask you, which one are you most proud of?

Frederick 43:01

Oh, wow. I don't know that there's one that I'm particularly most proud of, which is a cop-out? I'm fully aware. But I would I think that. Got me emotional. I think that the letter is not an essay, but a letter to my father. The latter half of the book is what I'm most proud of, not necessarily just as an author, but as a human being. Because I not only let go of him conceptually, but I've also never really been around my father, and we don't have it. We never had a relationship and I now get to let go of him conceptually. And even metaphysically, I let go of him. In my pain, I have this thing I say all the time. We all walk around with luggage. And the luggage is filled with things, and you can't have joy in your luggage. If there's too much pain in your life. There's just no room for both, right? So, you have to let go of some of that pain in order to make room for more joy and then travel with that. So, I let go of a lot of the harm and pain he caused me and also forgave him. I forgave him because I would be remiss to write this book and to see these systems and to understand what it was like being an Afro Latino man in the 80s during the crack epidemic in America, and to be caught up and swept away in that and not also in part forgive him. For what the systems did, I don't forgive him necessarily for my pain, but I forgive him for what he cannot control and for having become the person who caused it. So that I'm proud of.

Reema 45:13

Beautiful, thank you for what you said about we all carry around so much luggage and one of the things I've been thinking about a lot is the adage, take care of your trauma before it becomes someone else's

trauma. But if we change one word slightly, and you say, take care of your hurt before you share that hurt or before it becomes someone else's hurt, immediately, like the first line can almost be shaming. But when we change trauma to hurt, we realise we both have been hurt. Oh, yes. Oh, right. And it's so much more empathetic that way. And that's exactly what you've just spoken.

My, my next question for you is if you write one of my favourite essays, it was *The Rot in the Garden*. And one of my favourite things about your style of writing is that you lead us with a very subtle hand through a story or a letter. And it's a very, deceptively simple language, which then, like, guts, us, and we're like, oh, my God, we don't realise we're going to feel something until we're hit by that wave of emotion that you have conjured in us or alkalisied in us. And you do that so well, and every single piece of yours and I think in particular, *The Rot in The Garden*, where we think it's going to be an essay about social media, and it is, nonetheless you use that, that as a container, to speak so profoundly on your life with MS. And you take us on a profound and staggering journey, and it's the most powerful depiction of Instagram versus reality that I've ever come across. So, thank you for writing it. And I also wanted to ask you, what is the relationship between your MS and your writing? Or I should say your art?

Frederick 47:40

Yeah, well, I think, you know, first and foremost, I just appreciate the kind words that you've given me about that piece and so many pieces, I actually wrote that purposefully like that, I think I started it out, deceptively, to kind of like a mirror the deception that is social media. This idea that you don't really know what's behind, or what's looming, and things like that. So, I wanted to write it almost like this analogy to the very concept of what I was talking about, but in terms of my art and my writing, specifically, and things like that pertain to, you know, in relation to my MS. I think it gives me a chance not to be cliché here or to be, you know, a bigger pun, but it gives me a chance to be a good ancestor. I started the book with that, actually, very much the idea of what does it look like to start considering our legacies? Right, not considering your legacies, necessarily, in the end, not considering your legacies? In bad times when things are difficult, or you feel like you're not going to get a chance? But what does it look like to consider our legacies? As we're alive, as we're thriving, as we're existing, right? My MS and my writing are very much that I'm not writing about certain things and not tackling certain issues because I feel like I'm going to die. I'm tackling it because I feel like I'm alive. And it gives me an opportunity to say I was here, and when I was here. I made it worth it.

Reema 49:39

I love that. It's beautiful. So empowering. Inspiring. Thank you so much. So good. Thank you.

Frederick 49:51

Thank you. Thank you.

Layla 49:53

Thank you, Reema. Thank you, Fred, so much for this conversation. I loved listening into there and when you said it to think about being a good ancestor, just gives me chills just so many chills. Because you are that good ancestor to us and, and to so many people, and we're just so thankful for the legacy that you're already living while you're alive. And I always say I don't want to. I talk all the time about becoming an ancestor. I'm not ready to be that ancestor, yet I want to live a very long and full life and I

want to use it all up. And I see you doing that, and we're so grateful. To wrap up this conversation, I want to ask you, what does becoming a good ancestor mean to you?

Frederick 50:41

To me, becoming a good ancestor. I think, twofold. Being someone who lives in the image of the best parts of my mother and my grandmother. And someone who created I wouldn't just say spaces, someone who created I think sometimes spaces are too small, I think a world, right? A world that I think of someone who created a world in collaboration with people, like remind yourself that can stand against everything else. Right? That's what it looks like to me, right? Like as a space, because you know, space is something that can be moved space is something that can no longer exist, you can't move a world, right? And if we keep doing things like this, in my opinion, we are creating that world, right where nothing can move us. This is what it looks like to me.

Layla 51:56

That is powerful that when you went from space to world, that just took it to a whole new level. And I hope everybody listening in can feel the shift of thinking bigger, thinking way, way bigger, and allowing our creativity and our infinite vision to just shine through. Because there is world-changing work that needs to be done. And we could build whole new worlds, where the things that we're experiencing today that we've experienced for centuries could not exist. We can have totally different relationships with each other, and with our planet. So, thank you very much, Frederick. This is such a joy in a conversation. You're incredible. Cannot wait for your next book, that we'll be the first to pre-order, and just so grateful for your kinship as well.

Frederick 52:51

I am deeply grateful for the two of you and for having me. And I hope that people enjoy the book. I hope that we all learn from it. I'm still learning from having written it. So, thank you so so much.

Layla 53:07

Thank you.

Reema 53:09

Thank you.