

Layla Saad: Welcome, welcome everybody to episode one. We are here for the very first episode of good ancestor podcast. I'm your host, Layla Saad, and I am so excited to be here for our very first episode of Good Ancestor Podcast. I'm speaking with a trailblazing woman who is creating an incredible legacy of good ancestorship, especially as it relates to dismantling white supremacy, unpacking white feminism and creating space for the healing and liberation of people of color, especially of Black people in America. I'm talking about Rachel Cargle. Rachel.

Rachel Cargle: Hi!

Layla: Hi Rachel. Rachel is an activist, a writer and a lecturer. Her activist and academic work are rooted in providing intellectual discourse, tools and resources that explore the intersection of race and womanhood. Her social media platforms boast a community of over 140,000 people where Rachel guides conversations, encourages critical thinking and nurtures meaningful engagement with people all over the world. Rachel is one of the incredible Black women that I've had the pleasure of witnessing and growing alongside over the past year, and it's with great joy and excitement in my heart that she is our very first guest on Good Ancestor podcast. So welcome to the show, Rachel.

Rachel: Thank you so much. That was the introduction of my dreams.

Layla: I had to do you justice.

Layla: I'm, uh, I feel like this is like uh, a conversation that has really been needing to be had by the two of us, you know, and I'm really excited to be hosting you and to, to be diving deep with you today.

Rachel: Thank you so much. I am over- I don't even think overjoyed is a, a strong enough word. I'm so thrilled to be chatting with you right now.

Layla: Okay my love um the very first question that we're going to open with. Who are some of the ancestors, whether living or transitioned, familial or societal, who have influenced you on your journey?

Rachel: As I've been diving into this conversation at the intersection of race and womanhood, one of the biggest ways that I've been able to both become rooted and feel like I have a space to grow into has been really deep diving into the women of color, particularly Black women who have been doing this work, um, in the past. So women like Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, these women who I didn't even know about because of the way the system hides these heroes of ours who have been doing this type of work, but I didn't even know about them uh, until I picked up a book from a woman who was selling books on the sidewalk in Brooklyn. And I picked up a book that said 19th century Black women, the writings of 19th century Black women. And I picked up the book and you know what it ended up being a compiled transcript of

lectures as well as like newspaper articles and magazine articles from women from the 19th century, from Black women, who have been doing exactly what you and I are doing today.

Rachel: And it was as if someone had compiled, you know, to compare it to now. If someone compiled all of my Instagram posts, all of your blog articles and put them into a book and said, this is what people- this is what Black women of this time were doing to combat a system that was never made for them. And it just completely blew my mind that, you know, the, the work that we're doing is nothing new, it's just our turn, and so I've really been indulging and reading what other Black women were doing when it was their turn, so those women in particular, and also looking at the Maya Angelous, and even if we move it to today, the Brittany Coopers, the women who have been trailblazers in giving us research content, critical dialogue, and even as simple as the words to use in, in expressing ourselves in this conversation about race. These are the women who have just given me such strong rooting and such radical hope as I continue to do this work.

Layla: Wow. Rachel, I, I just got chills like you have no idea how meaningful that is to me. Um, a big part of why I claimed for myself this purpose of wanting to become a good ancestor and why we're even here having this conversation right now is precisely exactly the kind of story that you're talking about. So last year I stumbled across the writings of um, Audre Lorde and she changed my life. And you know, when you, when you were saying about this book was like if 19th century Black women had, had had Instagram accounts and blogs I mean that's how I felt when I was reading Audre's work that wow, first of all, nothing's new. She could be talking about something I experienced today. Right. And then also though that you know, that, that you made this really great point you said the work that we're doing is not new. It's our, it's just our turn to do it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Layla: And so that for me, like, you know, there could be, you could say like, okay, nothing's changed, so that could be a source of feeling like disappointment or feeling, um, like what's the point of doing it? And there definitely is that feeling of still, we're still here having these same conversations. But for me, I also find that where I gained strength and when I'm feeling lost, when I'm feeling confused and I'm feeling I don't know what my next steps are, I don't, I need to recenter, I returned to those writings because they, they did, they came before and they've been through it.

Rachel: Yeah, for sure. It's both a source of, uh, you know, research in the terms of going back and seeing what has been said, but it's also a space of reflection, seeing, seeing ourselves in these women, seeing our strengths, seeing our struggles, seeing, you know, being able to laugh with them in regards to the responses they were getting from society at the time and being like, yep, seen that, heard that, been there, done that, but also being able to really pull from, okay, what was their response, where do they still find their strength, where do

they still find this creative passion because, you know, doing this work is, isn't just a source of um, I dunno intellect, it's also a source of creativity to be able to continuously show up with something that takes a sense of, a bit of creative force. Um, and so there's just so much of their existence has been a supplement to what I'm doing and it's, I just value it.

Layla: I really appreciate you sharing that. That just, it made me feel all fuzzy and warm. Like we're in the right place having the right conversation, you know?

Rachel: Yeah.

Layla: Yeah. You know, one of the things that, um, in talking about reading those writings of women from the past, um, in addition to kind of, as you said, the kind of intellectual discourse where I found where I have found really great, um, comfort in is reading about that internal journey, their personal journey themselves as people who were Black people who were women, um, and you know, had their own stuff going on, you know, outside of what society, um, the, the issues that they had to deal with in society, but their own personal journey as well. I'm really interested in not only speaking to change makers, em, and the work that they're doing out in the world, but also speaking to change makers and understanding what is the journey like for you. You know, it's so easy for us to see someone who has a big platform is making a great impact and think they are super human. Right. Um, I, I'd really be interested to hear about what your journey is like--your internal journey has been like.

Rachel: Yeah. I think this work has been so interesting because it's not like I, you know, I don't think any of us woke up one morning and we're like, you know what, I'm gonna to start working on white supremacy. It's something that we kind of roll into through our personal experiences and then it kind of just becomes such an expression of self in a way. And so, um, and I always say I was highly prepped for this as a young girl because I grew up in an all white neighborhood. I was often the only Black girl in a space. I also had to very much grapple with my identity as a Black woman in America when I was confronted with the ways that I was quote unquote different from my Black family because of the way that I grew up around white people. And um, whether it was the way that I talked or the type of music I was into or the way that I prefer to dress. Um, there was always this type of, uh, grappling that was happening between, um, having some hard definition of what being Black was as well as just enjoying what I enjoy for whatever reason. And so, I think subconsciously all through my life I've been having these conversations with myself and then as I became an adult and I had the words, the language to start having this conversation out loud, it has shifted into this, um, this grand reckoning with who I am as a Black woman in the world. And so I think that so much of trying to find my identity as a child has put me into this space of feeling incredibly powerful now that I've found it, or incredibly empowered I should say now that I found it. Um, and so coming into this space has made me hyper aware of things that, not just hyper aware now, but hyper aware of retrospectively. So now as I am, most of my work is on Instagram, but when I share you know some things on Facebook where I have a lot of my white

friends from when I was younger, I've been hyper aware of like how are they responding and how does that show me who they were while I was there in their space while I was there in their world back in Ohio. And how are, you know, their adult parents, you know I'm Facebook friends with some of my friends' parents, like how are they responding? And it's been this very full circle moment of how race has played a role, how my Blackness has played a role, how my womanhood has played a role all throughout life, uh, where the little nuances of each of those identities showed up. And I'm kind of seeing it now in this big bold way is both, is both like a sigh of relief like, oh, now I can finally talk about this thing in depth with this intellectual discourse because it means so much to me because it was so much of who I was. So it's both a sigh of relief as well as this um, you know, this excitement to finally deep dive into, I don't, when people ask me what am I studying in school, I tell them, you know, anthropology and women's studies, but really what I'm studying is myself, I'm studying what it's like to be a Black woman and doing in depth research in the world. And so it's like, and now this space to really deep dive into who I am in a way that both commands critical discourse from others in my world and also pools from a very academic space to where I'm getting to learn about ancestors. I'm getting to learn about statistics. I'm getting to learn about systematic issues and how all of those relate to me as an individual and my role in this country.

Layla: Hm. I really love what you said there about what I'm really studying is myself because you know, I know that a big part of the good ancestor work that you're doing in the world is around white feminism. Right? And so people are like, oh, that Rachel, she's the, she's the one who does the white feminism lectures. But really that's not the driving force behind your work is not to, it's not to help white women it's too...

Rachel: Absolutely and they get so confused. I have to check people often when they say, you know, thanks for serving us white women, thanks for teaching us white women, thanks for whatever way they'd like to center themselves in the work that I'm doing and I have to say that I am serving Black women and Black in the Black community to the highest degree and this is the lane for which I'm doing it. And in no way is my work, no way am I here to serve white people. I am here to provide tools to create a safer world for the Black community, for my nieces and nephews, for my mother, for you know all of the little girls who come up to me during my lectures and say, wow, I never had language for this. Wow. This is what I've been seeing and feeling and no one told me that I was valid in it. And so while this is the lane through which I'm serving my community, I can see how there's a lot of confusion, but I'm always happy to make it clear that what I'm doing is a means to an end, which is the service for the protection, the empowerment, the seeing of, the hearing of, the service of the Black community.

Layla: Hm. That's, uh, I love that you've said that, you know, you're doing this really big collective healing and liberating and transformational work. And when we look at white supremacy, and I know both of us, our work has really been confronting white supremacy and we have many peers whose work is also

around that. And it's, it's just really incredible to me how each one of us does it in our own unique way. And as you said, leading, leading in my way. Right? And so sometimes that looks like, um, you know, just kind of talking about your examples like you, like you have your unpacking white feminism lectures and we'll talk that in a moment where you're addressing white women, but you're also, your anti racism work, your liberation work is also that study of self and that, um, you know, something that I love about you is that you really prioritize your joy and your pleasure as a Black woman and that is just as much a part of that work as everything else that you're doing. Um, Kay, let's talk a little bit about your Unpacking White Feminism lecture series tour because you've, you've had like an amazing past year or so where you have been touring the country, um, doing these sold out lectures. How has that been for you and what have been the biggest lessons you've learned as you've been doing that work?

Rachel:

Yeah, this lecture tour has been incredible. Um, both from what I've learned, what I've been able to teach and the people I've been able to meet. I think, one of, um, one of my favorite things about this tour is that it was completely, it was completely planned out, so to speak, by my followers, you know, people contacted me and said, I want to bring this conversation to my community and that's where we went. And so I think that has, that has put me into a space of heightened engagement with the people because they wanted to be there, they wanted to have the conversation and so this tour has really been such a, such a, both a pleasure to be able to do what I love so much. Writing and speaking are, you know, the dreams that I had to do as a career to do something meaningful in the world. So to do that has been great. But to walk into rooms full of people eager to deep dive into a conversation has, has been a joy. And I think some of, I think the easiest way to describe how this has been for me is the two greatest compliments I get whenever I go out and I'm able to speak to people after is 1) When people tell me, you know, Rachel, I really felt like I was in a college classroom, you know, coming to your lecture I truly felt that I was back in school sitting, taking notes, learning, you know, really intense, really intense academia. And um, I have a goal to bring this type of critical discourse to the public. I think in the academy, especially attending a school like Columbia where it's so pretentious and there's so much elitism within the world of academia, I take a lot of pride in being able to bring that type of learning to the public.

Rachel:

All of my lectures are public. People can come in and I have a pool of scholarship money, so people who can't afford it can still attend, so that's one thing I take a lot of pride in with my lecture. The other thing is that it always have, while my audience is mainly women of co-- uh, white women who are coming to learn about race, I always have such great joy when there's women of color in the room and the other compliment that I often get from the women of color who come in is them telling me, you know, I never knew I could be so bold in my Blackness. I never knew that I could talk to white women this way. I never knew that I could demand my respect and my voice and my space be taken seriously and be heard. And so again, it's one of those situations where white women think like, oh, Rachel is coming to teach us about white feminism. It also stands for a very, a very real space for women of color to come in and say, okay, here

are some of the points, the words, the language I can use to have this conversation in everyday spaces such as their workplace, their neighborhood, their classroom. And so it's been a really special space and way for me to grow both in doing this work and to connect meaningfully with all of the people, all of my audience of my work.

Layla: Mmm. I, I really love that. I've, I've definitely found that the kind of emotional support and nourishment of Black women has really sustained me. Um, right. And, and continues to remind me why I do the work that I do. And um, it's, there's just nothing like it.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah, I agree. I agree. I always, I mean, I always say being in spaces with women, with women of color is my space of healing. It's where, it's where I feel safe, most safe. It's where I feel most seen. It's where I feel most understood and so whenever I see a woman of color in the room of my lecture or my work or of my workshop, um, I, I can, I feel like I can exhale a little bit. And so I'm deeply grateful for the women of color who also come out. And, and I've also, I've also had these incredible experiences where women of color say I didn't want to be here. I, I just wanted to I-- I just wanted to give you support. So they'll sit in the back of the room and they'll happily just like wave, when I look back because they know how, you know, how dangerous or how violent sometimes spaces can be with all white women. And so I feel like wherever I go in the world, there has been women of color who have my back and are happy to be there to even just share space with me as a form of support.

Speaker 1: Mmm. That's beautiful. Um, the, that's a great kind of jumping point for what I wanted to talk about next, which is that the work that you're doing, the work that any Black woman does when she speaks about white supremacy, white feminism is not always like candy and flowers and rainbows and Unicorns, right. There's a lot of risk both in the work that we do online and as you're doing in person as well. Let's talk a little bit about how you navigate that, how you navigate the, um, I know you get a lot of comments, a lot of DMs. Um, I know you had an incident recently in person where you felt quite unsafe. Um, how do you navigate that and kind of stay grounded in yourself?

Rachel: You know, it's so, so hard and especially as-- I'm a very emotional person, I'm an empath for sure, and it's so hard for people to believe because of both of us are very strong willed in our work, but that's not always a reflection of our emotions. So it's, it's been certainly a growth, a space of growth for me to both, um, you know, not take things personally. Remembering that people are coming to me from whatever platform they're on in life and that it's not about me, but also, you know, one thing that and I mentioned a bit with Phoebe Robinson last night and she mentioned this as well, talking about, you know, we get these hateful DMs, we get these comments that are just so vicious and violent. But then I remember, you know, my ancestors were chased by dogs. My ancestors were hosed down in the streets. My ancestors babies were taken away from them. My ancestors had these moments of enslavement, of sexual violence. You know, all of these things that, what I'm dealing with now are so minute

compared to. So I'm learning to manage my reactions and manage my, um, you know, how much I'm Burrying, I'm holding onto this stuff by kind of keeping in mind that, you know, I'm sure my ancestors wished someone just sends a bad message if that was the extent of what they were having to deal with as a result of the work they were doing in the world. So just try to keep perspective really, I think.

Layla: I really appreciate that perspective, Rachel. Um, it just gave me chills. It, it's such a reminder of the privilege that we do have now and at the same time, right? Because those are things that we don't have to worry about. Um, and at the same time, it also reminds me of how much further there is still to go, um, that we don't, we still don't get to feel the safety that we would feel if we were privileged in the same way that white people are privileged.

Rachel: Yeah. And it's, you know, the truth is even, you know, although we're not dealing with the dogs or the hoses or all of those other very violent things that happen to the bodies of our ancestors, it's coming from the same source of hate. So although I can separate the, uh, the physical manifestation of that hate from what my ancestors did, what keeps me going is that yes, I'm not dealing with exactly what they did, but we're still confronting the same hate.

Layla: That's powerful. That's really powerful. And, and so what I'm seeing as well and what I'm, what I experience and what I see in you and, and again in my peers, is that as people who are leading important conversations and important work, it's really important for us to be prioritizing our self care, um, for us to be prioritizing our boundaries, um, for us to be really managing our expectations. I had to learn that this year for sure, that's something my mentor taught me the importance of managing your expectations that you showing up the way you're showing up unapologetically in that way is just going to cause the reactions that it's gonna cause, um, so not going into it naively and at the same time really taking care of ourselves, you know. Um, as you, as you continue, I know you've had massive growth over the last year as you, as your impact continues to kind of expand. How are you managing how you stay rooted so that you don't get kind of swept up, if that makes sense.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah. I, I appreciate that question because it is hard to, you know, keep, keep your vision clear with all of, with all that's a whirlwind around me and I think that, um, being in school definitely helps with that because, you know, school is such a structured process so it's like, you know, you do this, you get, you get this and then you move onto the next step. So I think school has definitely helped me keep my eye on my prize, which I mean maybe this is a good place to mention, you know, school is my priority and looking, I'm looking to get my PhD and I'm looking to do this type of conversation in a college setting and continue- , continuing to do it publicly. And so, uh, I just happen to be interestingly building my public career before my academic career comes. So, um, I think that you know school has helped but also staying in deep personal and intimate conversation with women like you, with other Black women who

are doing this work, being reminded of what's happening in the minutia of this work and the nuance of this work.

Speaker 2: Um, because with the world of social media, like there's so many podcasts we could be on, there's so many interviews we could do, there's so many you know collaborations that can be done, but stepping back and surrounding myself with the Black woman who I'm on the front lines with, um, is just a very grounding way to say, here's who I'm with and here's what we're doing. And I love what you said earlier, how there's, you know, if we consider who our peers are, we're all doing this work in such different ways. And I adore that. I love seeing the ways that we're all, like I said, there's a creativity to this, a creativity to saying how am I going to show up to have this conversation? And we all do it in different ways. And so both honoring how other people are doing the work while maintaining the way that I'm doing it as well has been a big source of pride and excitement to be able to cheer other people on and be able to, um, really get down and dirty and say, you know, how do I want to show up in this space? How do I want to show up in the world doing this work and so I guess the answer to that is that my grounding continues to be in my sisters, and the women of Color, and the books that I'm reading, like you said, like Audre Lorde and all the women we're reading and just being aware of and appreciating how they're showing up and that keeping me very just very open and insightful on how I'm doing that myself.

Layla: Mmm. I really love that. It sounds like your vision is very clear, Rachel. I know you have many things that you are doing, you, I mean, I mean, yeah, some of the things I was- , I made a list today of like some of the things that Rachel is-- you're student at Columbia University, Columbia University, you've got this lecture series tour, the Unpacking White Feminism Tour. You're a columnist for Harper's Bazaar. You have a Do the Work 30 day course. You also have been fundraising a therapy fund for Black girls and Black women, which I want to talk about next. You know, I know my capacity. I have. I don't have the capacity to do all the things that you're doing right now, um, because I, I just, I just know myself, I know my capacity-

Rachel: Well, I, I always say-- and I think of you often in particular because you're a mother and you're wife and you know, you have very heavy responsibilities and commitments and relationships that you're managing. And I, and I often say, I'm so grateful that I'm doing this now. I don't have any kids. I'm not in a relationship. You know, I, there's, there's not, this is my time to do this. This is my, this is my time to, um, to take everything I've got and put it all in for the good of, you know, the end goal of continuing to empower and pour it into communities of color. And so I am often in awe of women like you who are doing the same type of work I'm doing, but also managing all these very critical aspects of life. I couldn't imagine. I couldn't imagine doing it. So as much as I get people saying like, oh, you're doing so much, I always have to remind people that this is my focus, this is it, this is what I'm putting, this is what I'm pouring myself into. Right. I don't have a partner, I don't have-- I'm single everyone, but I'm open to a relationship. I don't have a partner, i don't have any children and I

take a lot of pride in being able to, you know, indulge in this and be super, super intentional. But I also, when this conversation comes up, I always want to remind people that a lot of other women who are in this work are also gloriously managing other aspects of life. So while my load seems heavy, it's because it's what I'm giving my all to. While other people are very beautifully managing their time and space and energy and love with other, with other parts that they've created for themselves.

Layla: I really appreciate you sharing that because you're at- you're absolutely right. I mean, I remember when I first started working for myself, um, in 2014 and I had started to- I decided to start working on my business two weeks after my second child was born.

Rachel: Oh.

Layla: Yes, kind of- I had a lot I still had a lot of creative energy in me, I think from the pregnancy. Um, but I, at first would compare myself to other women who I felt were further ahead that I knew I had the same potential as. And it would take longer. I was breastfeeding, I was pumping milk, I was sleep deprived. I, you know, I had all kinds of things going on and now my kids are older, they're nine and four. Um, but they still really need me, you know, and so my priorities are, you know, if I were to like create a list, I come at the top first and then my, my family, my kids and my, my husband and then my work comes third. Um, and I think it's really important for us to honor and be aware of the stage of life that we're at and just and just know that where we're at, if, if, if you are, if someone's listening and they do feel like I don't have the capacity to do that because I have these responsibilities. I mean I know that my kids are not going to be nine and four forever you know what I mean.

Rachel: And I also think it's also worth noting and I get this question a lot when I'm out, um you know speaking publicly, I have women of color raised their hand and say, you know, I just don't know how to get involved. I feel like I feel like I should be doing something but I don't know how to do what you're doing. And I always remind women of color you existing is revolutionary. You being here and breathing and living and, you know, existing in a country, in a world that has proven over and over again that who we are as Black women is a threat to them or frustrates them. You existing and doing it well is enough. I always say like, I'm out here doing it, Layla's out here doing it, Shishi's out here doing it. There's a whole bunch of women who I don't even know about out you're doing it. And so a Black woman existing is, is the work and there's some of us who are taking on the work in this particular way, but for anyone who's listening, who feels like, oh, I'm not doing what Rachel's or what Layla's doing or or what any other of these people who are found just via Instagram are doing this type of work. It's not everyone's work. And that's okay. And I'd never have deep any expectations for another woman of color to take on things in the way that I have taken it on.

Layla: Mm. Yeah. One hundred, one thousand percent for sure. Um, I, I strongly agree with that and I'm really glad that you added that. And again, it goes back to

understanding where you are to where you, where you want to lead from, where you hold. I mean, clearly you're called to this work. Um, and so even though it's tough, the work that you're doing is tough. The conversations that you're having are hard. I, I know it gets very exhausting, but I can see also how you are so fueled by your work because you understand the purpose behind it and you're doing it in a way where you are centering yourself.

Rachel: Yeah.

Layla: Yes. And that has a completely different quality to it when, when you know why and you know that you're at the center, it has a completely different quality to it.

Rachel: Agreed. Agreed.

New Speaker: So let's talk about your therapy fund, Rachel. This is like, I was.

Rachel: So exciting.

Layla: Yeah, I mean this is huge for those, for those listeners who don't know what I'm talking about, can you tell us a little bit about this therapy fund?

Rachel: Yeah. Well, for my 30th birthday I decided that I wanted to fundraise for something and something I've been thinking about for years now is just my own personal deep appreciation for having access to mental healthcare because it's not something I always had a continuous access to. And so I decided that I wanted to raise funds for us to start to, um, make available mental health services for women and girls of color. And so I did it, I just created a Go Fund. I remember I was sitting at a Starbucks cafe and I was like, you know what, I'm just going to do this now. I did it. I, there was all this planning that I felt like I needed to do. And I was like, no, I'm just gonna do it because it needs to be done. The holidays are coming up, those can be so hard for us, um, for anyone.

Rachel: And I was like, you know what, I just need to do it. So I made it. I said this is going to be my 30th birthday fundraiser. And my first number was 10,000. When I first started it, I was like, I'd love to raise \$10,000 to help a few women of color - a few Black women pay for their therapy sessions. And I posted it and uh, we got to 10,000 in 24 hours.

Layla: Wow.

Rachel: And I was like, wait, this is something, this is something people are ready to invest in something people are willing to put their money towards. So I um, move the number to 100,000 and we reached that number in three weeks and so I'm keeping the fund going. My birthday, I still have a few weeks to go and so I'm thrilled to see how much we continue to raise and it's just been absolutely incredible to see what I've been calling a community live redistribution of

wealth because most of my followers, I'm very aware, are middle class, middle age white women. And so that's what a lot of people who are donating are obviously from my social media community and so to see these funds, these very very tangible tool shifts in the community and go directly to Black women and girls has just been incredible.

Layla: That, that's, It's so incredible, Rachel, and you know, again, we were speaking earlier about different ways of approaching this work, of the dismantling of white supremacy. And it's not just the education piece, it's not just the information piece. It's also about the redistribution of funds and the redistribution of resources and access and racism takes such a toll on people of color, especially Black people who also have to deal with the factor of anti Blackness and especially Black women and non, non CIS men, um, who have to deal with misogynoir. And so to be able to create, first of all, I love when I see a person who's just like, I'm go-, I want to do this and I'm going to do it and I'm doing it now. And that kind of blows my mind a little bit because I know I can tend to overthink things sometimes or kind of think about what all the hurdles might be or, you know, have everything really, really perfect. And so I, I hope for whoever's listening that you get, you're inspired by that, that if you have something, an idea, something that you want to do, just go for it.

Rachel: Yeah.

Layla: You don't know what could happen.

Rachel: Yeah, it's, it's good. Give the world, given the universe a chance to, to surprise you, you know, take what you have. You don't trust that you were given something for a reason, and I'm like, yeah, you commented on it. We were talking about how I had made a Facebook status just a year ago. Right. You know, I'd love to be able. I was thinking about it for myself. I didn't, I mean I didn't have the platform that I have now at the time, so wouldn't have gone this avenue in the first place at that time. But I had made a Facebook post exactly a year ago. Probably I think three weeks, about three weeks ago is when I posted it. But I shared this space memory from a year ago that said I would really love to pay for, you know, a mental health session for Black women. And then a year later I had, you know, raised over \$100,000 for that exact thing. And so I think that when you, when something is planted in you, when you have this idea, it's not at random and it's not just because you have to really take into consideration that this was given to you and you're not tasked to live it out. And the universe will give you the tools you need to move forward with that.

Layla: Absolutely. I really think of, you know, this podcast is called good ancestor podcast and for me, the reason it's called that is because I see all of us who are living now as living ancestors are in a time where we have a lot of privilege and choice around how we are going to live our lives and about how we are going to leave our lives and what we're going to leave behind. And I think it's really important for us to be thinking about, regardless of if you have a platform or not, regardless of what work you do in the world or if you're, you know, if

you're, if you're, um, if you're not doing any work right now, it, it doesn't really matter. Each one of us has the potential to plant seeds that could become something really great. Whether it impacts one person or a million people.

Rachel: Yeah. I think to touch on that, um, and I've been thinking about it a lot, especially having been invited to this particular podcast with the title that it has regarding ancestors. I personally don't plan on having children. I don't have interest in birthing any children of my own or being a mother. And so to consider the ways that I'm still an ancestor.

Layla: Absolutely.

New Speaker: To consider the ways that I still exist in a space that will affect future generations. That's big. That's big to consider that, you know, we're often taught that legacy is through generational familial connection, but it's not, there's so many, there's so much we can. And even if you do have kids your legacy is beyond those children--

Layla: Ah hm.

Rachel: its for other, you know, hundreds and thousands of women in hundreds and thousands of generations after us. So for people to connect their legacy with children they might have for-- i just want to encourage the people listening to really understand that you are an ancestor, whether you have children or not, and you are an ancestor to people beyond the children that you have. So really, you know, step into that--

Layla: Mmm.

Rachel: Consider that and your good ancestorship is critical and it's needed. And it should be offered with as much love as you would give to your individual child, but with the understanding that it goes so much farther beyond.

Layla: Absolutely. I thank you so much for speaking to that. Again, this is exactly why I called this podcast this, and, you know, I call Audre Lorde my ancestor. You know, she's, she's not-- right?

Rachel: Yeh, Maya Angelou's my ancestor.

Layla: For me as well. I mean, I, I named my daughter after Maya Angelou, because--

Rachel: Yeh.

Layla: You know, and, and, you know, I have my blood ancestors, but I don't have access to their writings. I don't have access to what they left behind. Um, I know they're there, I know that there must have been at least one person from my ancestry who was like me, but the, the, the, um, when I think of who I turn to,

it's, um, they, they're not necessarily people in my lineage. Um, you know, Audre had two children and that I'm not one of their descendants, but I call her, I call her my literary ancestors. And I think of myself and the work that I do, my personal work is definitely about, first and foremost for me as a mother healing, um, what needs to be healed in our family lines, um, for my children. But then I know that beyond that my work will have a legacy beyond people I will never meet, you know, I think of Audre and I'm like, wow could she have imagine-- imagined that one day an Arab Middle Eastern British woman living in the Middle East, you know, who writes about white supremacy to mainly Western audience would be gaining so much nourishment...

Rachel: Yeh

New Speaker: ...from her work. And I think, yeah, I think she did actually. I think she probably did know that, you know, and so we have to think so much further than just beyond ourselves because we will have an impact on those around us whether we are intentional about it or not. And I would rather be intentional about it.

Rachel: Absolutely. I agree.

Layla: Yeah. And so, you know, talking about the therapy fund, you know, the effect that that can have you giving you helping to give access to mental health ser--, mental health services to Black girls and women. You have no idea the impact that that can have...

Rachel: Yeh.

Layla: For them personally for if they have family, friends, the ripple effect it will have on them. It's really profound to think about it.

Rachel: I think that's what I'm most excited about to consider the fact that these women and girls, you know, they have families and they have work sites and they have all of these intersections of their existence that mental health is a part of and so I'm thrilled to think of not only the nourishment and care that these individual women will get, but how that having been nourished and having been cared for will then further grow into the way that they're nourishing and caring for their children, their spouse. How empowered they feel in their work, how safe they fill in their spaces, how much they're willing-- , how much they're going to be willing to speak up and out about things that they might not have been before due to not having that type of mental health support. And so, I think that there's just, I, I hope I have a deep hope that this goes further than I could ever imagine, both in terms of making the care accessible. Um, I ha, I currently have a team who's working on turning, turning this into a nonprofit so we can continuously do this work...

Layla: Yes!

Rachel: It's very exciting, but to consider not only how we can continue to offer individual women care, but to con-- , to consider what this care will mean for individual households, communities and how that will, you know, expand beyond what we can imagine at this moment.

Layla: Absolutely. It's just so exciting to think about it. And um, you know, it's these, it's, it's these tangible actions. It's when I see women like herself doing these really tangible things that will, that will really make a difference. It just, it really fortifies me and really strengthens me in my vision and my work as well. So thank you for being you, Rachel. Thank you for being awesome.

Rachel: Thank you.

Layla: Rachel, another thing that I wanted to talk to you about, um, your work sits at the intersection of race and womanhood and I know a big part of being a woman is our relationship to our body. And I know this is something that you've wrote about. I recently saw an amazing pho- , photo shoot that you did. You looked amazing.

Rachel: Thank you.

Layla: I would love to hear about your relationship with your body, how that's been a part of your inner and outer activism.

Rachel: Yeah. It's so hard

Layla: (Layla giggles in background)

Rachel: As women, our relationships with our body is so hard and I have actually gained a lot of weight in the last two years and um, it's been, it's been this very interesting space of both feeling empowered and feeling the normal feelings that we often have around self consciousness or shame around what expectations are for our body to look like. And if we don't meet that we feel a certain way about ourselves. And so I have been through things like these nude photo shoots and even the clothes I wear and the conversations I'm willing to have about my body. It's, it's been kind of just reclaiming, reclaiming my body, reclaiming the authority to decide whether I feel good about it or not and not giving other people the space to make that decision for me. And I found that the more empowered I am within this body that I, that I exist, the more other people have space to feel comfortable, the more other people have space to be themselves and it's-- , and it all boils down to, I'm continuing to see it all that boils down to it's just a body. It's not, you know, I've been saying recently that regardless of how my body shifts, if I lose 50 pounds next year because I feel like it, that's not gonna change my worth. If I gain 50 pounds this year because I want to or because I have to or for whatever reason because it happens to happen, that's not going to change my worth either. And so I really working on right now separating my worth from the way my body presents.

Layla: Mmm.

Rachel: So I, um, in the photo that you were referring to I had a photo shoot with iconic photographer, Sarah Bahbah, and um one of the, just the behind the scenes note that was really fun is that my, Sarah was shooting me and then we had our friend Vera who was there also, she was kind of just hanging out with us and we all were like, how bout we just all get naked? So we were all just there naked in the apartment in the photoshoot just like existing in our bodies and being comfortable and feeling glamorous with, you know, the setting and the idea of it. And so I think it really all boils down to what I'm working with right now is separating how my body presents with how I feel worth and it's been revolutionary for me and my mind and I've just gotten so many messages from other women saying like, thanks, thanks for letting me feel okay. Or thanks for letting me feel like I have the option to feel beautiful regardless of what my body looks like or feels like in any given moment.

Layla: Mmm. You know, I, I really have in from, from my own journey, what I have seen is that the more I heal, the more I work on myself and work on my core wounds and work on healing my relationship with myself and defining myself for myself and all of that inner work, the more that I do that, the more it just, it opens up..

Rachel: Yeh.

Layla: ...uh capacity. It opens up room for other people to breathe, you know, and for other people to say, hey, if she can be in that kind of a relationship for herself, maybe it's possible for me as well.

Rachel: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Layla: So much of what you're doing is, is healing work. Um, I just really want to acknowledge you for that because it's, um, and, and this is for any, and this is what I've seen for Black women that when we heal- , when we are healing ourselves, and you said this earlier, like just existing as yourself is revolutionary. Um, to move from merely surviving as Black women in an anti Black world to thriving as Black women in an anti Black world is, is revolutionary. And so when I see those pictures of you and when I see you really showing up, it just, it's like, yes, you know, that's like a win for all of us.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah. I agree.

Layla: Not just Rachel's individual win. It's a win for everybody.

Rachel: Yep. Yeah. And that's what I hope. That's what I hope it can be. I hope that all of our joy is all of our joy. And all of our success is all of our success. Um, and I think that I, it gives me so much joy to think that people are thinking of it that way and I just hope we continue to do so.

Layla: Hm. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Um, Rachel, a big part of my work, one of the kind of foundational pillars of my work and where it really started from is spirituality and I'm always really curious when I see people who are doing change making work in the world, I'm always really curious to know what your inner spiritual life is like and how that informs your work in the world.

Rachel: You know, I'm currently unpacking a lot of my own personal spirituality. I grew up in the church, deep in the Black church, in America, in the Baptist church in particular, and when I was younger I was married from age 19 to about age 23 to a minister whose parents had their own church and we met through the church. So I was just incredibly involved. My, my, my spirituality was incredibly rooted in the Black Baptist Church, the Black Apostolic Church. And when I left my marriage it was a--, I suddenly put myself into a space to kind of exhale and decide what I was going to inhale, decide like, okay, what, what is it that I'm going to, what is it that I understand about myself? What is it that understand what the world, what is it that I understand about relationships and body and gender roles? And you know, all of these things that had been spoon fed to me through my experience with the Church and um, I needed to digest it, or not basically. And so right now I think I'm still in that space of unpacking everything that I had been taught to understand and know and believe. And it's been an incredibly wholesome journey I would say, of making those decisions for myself.

Layla: Mmm. And how does that, um, impact--, how does that play with the work that you do out in the world? Is there sort of a connection there? And even if it's not necessarily a, um, no, not necessarily religious or spiritual in the kind of traditional sense. Is there a kind of underpinning something bigger than yourself that you turn to as part of your work?

Rachel: You know, what I'm thinking now that we're having this conversation thinking about, you know, me deciding to post nude photos, or me deciding to use the celebration of my birthday to raise funds to invest into the Black community. I think that's kind of like a, a visual of what I'm exploring. I think everyone's seeing me go through this journey even though it's not something that I talk about, but I think everyone who, you know, who's part of my audience is an active, an active, actively looking in on me, determining what matters to me and what I care about and where I put my faith and where I put who I believe in and what I believe in and what I'm willing to fight for and what I'm willing to let go of. And so while I can't say that I can pinpoint any specific thing, I can definitely affirm that everything that people are seeing as I continue to grow both on my platform and my work and as a person, is a continued window into me deciding what my soul is rooted in.

Layla: MMM. Yes. I feel, I feel that. I feel you. Um, and also, you know, as a kind of a outsider looking in, um, one of the things that I've observed about you and the way that you move in the world is that clearly you are-- the work that you're doing is collective based and community based. I mean, I'll give you an example, one of the things that you do every Friday, is friend care Friday, right, so you have this Hashtag on Instagram that you use, which is #FriendCareFriday where

you ask people to like either send cash or some other kind of support to, to a friend and you're really encouraging people to take care of their people and people to really be aware of community. Um, and that feels to me that feels very, it, it just, it when you were speaking about church earlier, you know that there's that kind of we take care of each other as a community.

Rachel: Yeah, for sure. I think I hadn't thought about it like that, but that's very true. Like all the value-- it's not so much that I, you know, I think all religions hold the same values, which it shows up..

Layla: I agree.

Rachel: and so it's not that I had lost those values, but I'm show--, I'm bringing it to the world in a way that is authentic to me.

Layla: Yes. That's definitely what I see.

Rachel: And it's so interesting because I never thought about it that way with but that's so true.

New Speaker: It is the truth. And you know, I think had commented, I think you'd had a Friend Care Friday recently that was specifically for Black women and I commented on it and I said thank you and you said make sure to, you know, drop your Paypal. And I was like, oh, it's just in the link in my bio. And then that day and a couple of days following, I got so many Friend Care Friday donations, and I was like look at Rachel just taking care of Black women. Just, you know, taking- just giving us these unexpected moments of joy and that, that feels like um exactly as you were saying, you might not necessarily follow the religion in the same way, but there's those basic values of we take care of one another...

Rachel: Yeh.

Layla: And I think it's wonderful that you are using your platform and your voice in that way. Right? Because, you know, earlier I was asking you about how do you stay grounded as you grow so you don't get swept up. And I love that, you know, this just as one example, this Friend Care Friday act that you are, no matter what's happening, no matter what all the distractions are and all the opportunities and everything that's coming your way, you're really clear this is something that is important to me. I have to make sure that the community is taken care of.

Rachel: Yeah, for sure.

Layla: Yeah. It's pretty amazing. Thank you.

Rachel: Thank you. I remember when you wrote that and I was like, girl, this is for you this Friend Care..

Layla: Yeh. I totally did not include myself. I was just like, that's great.

Rachel: I know. And you know what? It blows my mind because this, this theme, I don't want to say theme, but this thought process is showing up with my therapy fund as well. And it, it just blows my mind because there's Black women who say, Oh Rachel, I just donated to your therapy funding. I'm like, okay, thanks. Did you sign up too? Like, why? Why didn't you sign-- you know like.

Layla: I feel you! I mean for sure when you, when you said also add your name, I was-- , in my mind I was like, what do you mean? You know? Um, and that's because, you know, I do have a lot of people supporting my work and I do have, um, you know, I do have a lot of support. And so I was like, well this can go to other people who need it more, but I think what you're, what you're saying is also really valid, which is that I'm still a Black woman in an anti Black world.

Rachel: Yeh. And, and there's the only qualifier, the only qualifier for my therapy fund, the only qualifier. I mean, I don't really have a qualifier per se for Friend Care Friday. That's for anyone. But you know, being a Black woman is period. End of sentence. There's no other explanation needed. There is no other qualifier. There is no other proof proving that needs to be done. That's it. That's what I'm here for. That's where, that's why I'm showing up. And so it, it surprises me, especially with-- talking again to the therapy fund, I have people sign up and then they email me this long email about why they want the therapy. And I'm like, girl, I made the form three questions for a reason. I didn't want you to have to pour, you know, relive your trauma. I didn't want, you have to feel like you were proving or trying to tell me why you deserved it. I wanted you, I wanted you to just tell me who your therapist is and I just want to put money on the books for you. That's it. There's nothing more than I need to make this valid or make this something that you deserve, but we're still working through those feelings of needing to do things like that.

Layla: Yeah. And I and I and I think, I think that's part of being a woman period and definitely of being a Black woman period, um, that need to, that, that feeling of, first of all that we, that we need to be strong, right? The strong Black woman and then that if we're, if we're going to be given something, we need to prove that we're in enough pain that we should deserve it.

Rachel: Yes. And I'm done with that.

Layla: Done.

Rachel: On so many levels.

Layla: Right. Done with pain pimping and that kind of thing because we shouldn't have to do that. It's dehumanizing. I'm with you. Um. Okay. Rachel, we're coming towards the end of our interview. I want to know what have been the hardest parts of your journey and the most joyful parts of your journey so far?

Rachel: Oh, well I'll start with the most joyful because that's easy, that's easy to think about. I think the most joyful has been the people I've met, the sisters I've gained, the community that has been built miraculously around me. Um, you know, as much as we hate social media is annoying and frustrating, distracting as it can be. It has been just this incredible garden of quality. People have incredible sisterhood of outlandish education that I'm just so, so grateful for. And I think that the community, I remember being younger and I didn't have a lot of friends per se, like I had, you know, school mates and things like that, but I always felt that I was missing out on deeper connections with people and it seemed like everyone else had them. And so I feel like I just landed in this big cloud of everything I've been praying for in terms of meaningful connections with people.

Rachel: And I don't take, I don't take it for granted one bit. As far as the most difficult, I think, um, I think the growing pains, I mean I've my-- you, you and I have followed each other for awhile but my platform has grown so quickly. And, I think that there's definite growing pains that have come with it and so as I'm incredibly grateful for, for existing in a space where I get to continuously be pushed to think harder and do more, and be more critical and gain more understanding, but it's hard. It's hard, it's a hard place to be in. And so, um, I sometimes just want to delete everything and hide under the covers and eat chocolate pretzels and no one know who I am and I don't know if it's ever happened to you, but I'm in this space where like people are recognizing me in public.

Layla: Mmm.

Rachel: And so I was at--, it's a place called shake shack in New York City.

Layla: Yeh we have Shake Shack here, yeh.

New Speaker: Oh my Gosh, wonderful. So I was at Shake Shack. And, I was like, it was after a day of classes and I was just feeling exhausted and who knows what I looked like and a girl comes up to me and is like, are you Rachel Cargle? And I wanted to be like, no, I'm not.

Layla: (Laughs)

Rachel: You know it was just a day where it was a hard day. And to have, I think the hard part is just to go through these growing pains, with an audience like this, can be difficult sometimes.

Layla: Mm. I feel that I have, um, I will when I, because we've, I think we've both been through very big jumps--

Rachel: Yeah, yeah.

Layla: in a short amount of time and something that I have seen is very important for myself is sustainability.

Rachel: Yeah.

Layla: And so I'm constantly thinking about how I can, um, make sure that I'm in the driver's seat...

Rachel: Yes.

Layla: ...and not other people's, um, purposes. You know, Audre Lorde has this quote and she says, um, she says there's two of them. She's one of them is "if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies of me." And then there's another one where she talks about, again, this idea of defining oneself for oneself, but that if we don't do it, that that other people, and I'm paraphrasing here, but that other people will define us and that it will usually be to their benefit...

Rachel: Yep!

Layla: and to our detriment.

Rachel: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. Um, I feel that that

Layla: Yeh.

Rachel: I feel that completely.

Layla: Right.

Rachel: that's the hard part of doing this work too. Yeah, for sure.

Layla: Right. And so I often think about that because I think when you're in a leadership position, first of all, as human beings, this is, we all do this. As human beings, we have this tendency to put people on a pedestal.

Rachel: Yeah.

Layla: Even when we don't want to be put on a pedestal, we tend to do it to other people. And so I know that there are people who see, when you see someone in a leadership position that you project onto them what you want.

Rachel: Yeah.

Layla: Right. Project onto them what you want, and then when they don't meet those expectations and they don't meet those definitions and those demands, we usually tear them down.

Rachel: Yeah.

Layla: And I think it's really important for anyone who's in a leadership position to be a first of all-- and again, I really, I really want to credit my mentor Dr. Frantonia Pollins for the work that she's helped me with around this, but I think first of all, it's really important for us to define ourselves for ourselves so that other people are not defining us for us.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Layla: And then secondly to be constantly checking in and say, and say, am I in control right now? Or who? Who's, who's in the driver's seat? And I have found, I don't know if this is something that you do, but I have found it really important to actually when things are moving really fast to actually consciously slow them down.

Rachel: Yeah, for sure. I agree with you 100 percent on that. And in my also being aware of how I want to slow down. I know I was so inspired when you took that break from Instagram

Layla: It was the best.

Rachel: I was so inspired and I was in, I remember thinking like, Oh, I would love to take a break from Instagram, but that's not my slow. That's not how it looks, that's not what was productively slow for me personally

Layla: Right.

New Speaker: And so, you know, I took a trip to Paris and I, there's just been other ways that I've been able, you know, I moved apartments and I did all of these little things that equaled what you did, but we a--, we both were being intentional on caring for ourselves--

Layla: Right.

Rachel: And regaining control. And so, um, yeah, I totally agree that not just slowing down but knowing how we need to slow down, where we need to, and being in control of what we know feels good and is our particular needs. But yes, I was incredibly inspired by your time away.

Layla: Thank you. Yeah. I think it's so important what you just said about knowing that self awareness around what does that look like for me? Um, because it doesn't have to look like someone else's. I just disappeared basically.

Rachel: Yeah. If I was to do that. I would feel anxious the whole time.

Layla: Right.

Rachel: It wouldn't be, it wouldn't be a way for me. I, I'd be thinking about like, I have something like, oh, I'd really love to share this or I'd really love to write something and that would not be a break for me. And so, you know, I had to be intentional. Okay. Hi, I'm never going to do this, what Layla did.

Layla: This is not realistic!

Rachel: Yeh, It's not realistic for how I exist in the world. So let me, let me do what I need to do to exist this way. And I've enjoyed observing how we all do, all of us who are doing this work, you know, listening to ShiShi talk about her therapy. Um, hearing how Kendreana is taking her work, her artist work onto Patreon. And I just, I love seeing all of us being intentional and in control of how we're showing up.

Layla: Amen. Amen. Rachel, thank you so much for such rich conversation. It's been so-- I can't believe it's our first time talking like--

Rachel: I know this is a long time coming!

Layla: Yes, and I feel like I feel like I've known you forever.

Rachel: Yeh.

Layla: And this, um, this conversation has been really, really nourished me. So thank you so much for bringing your whole self here.

Rachel: I'm so thrilled to be here and I'm so beyond excited for the continuation of this podcast. Uh, you're a good ancestor for getting this started.

Layla: Thank you, my love. So our final question, we're gonna to close out. This is our final, final question, Rachel. What does it mean to you to be a good ancestor?

Rachel: For me being a good ancestor, it's showing up, it's showing up and doing, you know, doing what you can with what you've got. And for all of us that looks different. For some it's the way we care for our children. Um, for some, it's the way we do our work. For some it's the way you, we stand boldly and I think that all of our ancestry will look incredibly different and there's beauty in that and that showing up in the way that you understand yourself and in the way that you know yourself and your tools and your talents and your skills, um, oftentimes we sit back in the comfort of just going with the flow of life, of daily routine, of systematic understandings of life. And I think that showing up, um, is the roots of good ancestry. How you take it from there can be as creative or as different as you need it to be, but we all need to show up.

Layla: Wonderful message to end with. Show up. Thank you so much, Rachel. Thank you.

