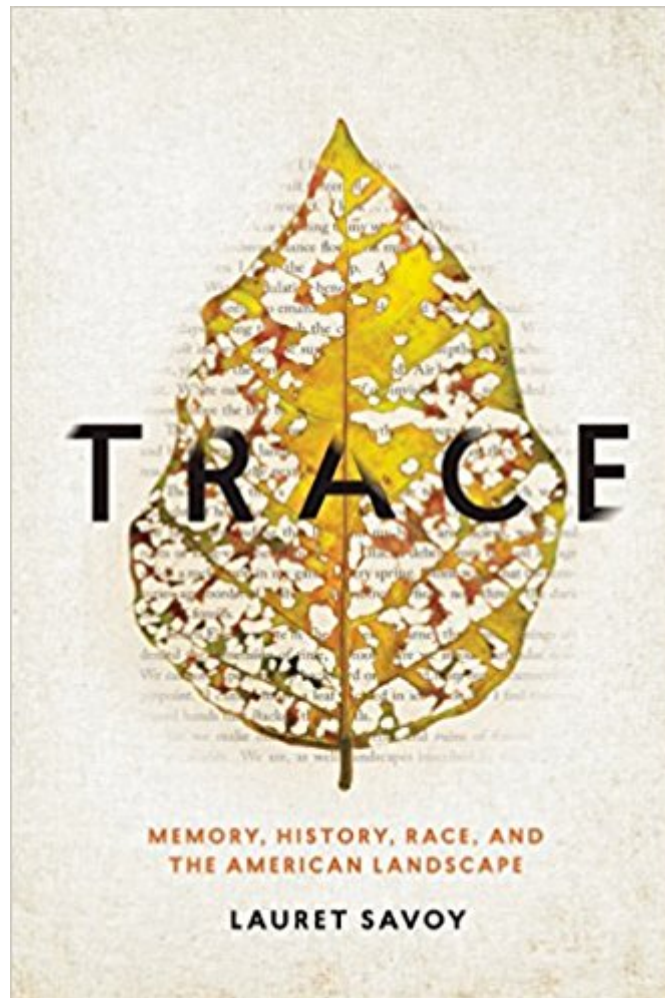




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# Trace: Memory, History, Race, And The American Landscape



## Synopsis

Winner of the ASLE Creative Writing Award Winner of the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation Finalist for the PEN American Open Book Award Finalist for the Phillis Wheatley Book Award Shortlisted for the William Saroyan International Prize for Writing Shortlisted for the Orion Book Award "I stand in awe of Lauret Savoy's wisdom and compassionate intelligence. *Trace* is a crucial book for our time, a bound sanity, not a forgiveness, but a reckoning." —Terry Tempest Williams Sand and stone are Earth's fragmented memory. Each of us, too, is a landscape inscribed by memory and loss. One life-defining lesson Lauret Savoy learned as a young girl was this: the American land did not hate. As an educator and Earth historian, she has tracked the continent's past from the relics of deep time; but the paths of ancestors toward her—paths of free and enslaved Africans, colonists from Europe, and peoples indigenous to this land—lie largely eroded and lost. In this provocative and powerful mosaic of personal journeys and historical inquiry across a continent and time, Savoy explores how the country's still unfolding history, and ideas of race, have marked her and the land. From twisted terrain within the San Andreas Fault zone to a South Carolina plantation, from national parks to burial grounds, from Indian Territory and the U.S.-Mexico Border to the U.S. capital, *Trace* grapples with a searing national history to reveal the often unvoiced presence of the past. In distinctive and illuminating prose that is attentive to the rhythms of language and landscapes, she weaves together human stories of migration, silence, and displacement, as epic as the continent they survey, with uplifted mountains, braided streams, and eroded canyons.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for *Trace*: Winner of the ASLE Creative Writing Award Recipient of the 2016 American Book Award from The Before Columbus Foundation "An earth historian by trade, Lauret Savoy journeys through the landscape and her own roots; in this sweeping book that's part memoir, part travelogue, part scientific text. Savoy digs into her Native American, European and African-American history and maps her discoveries against our thoughts about place in this fascinating book." [The Huffington Post](#) "a thoughtful collection of essays ... Savoy raises more questions than she answers, but they are the kind of questions that provoke discussion. This is not a book to be read quickly. Rather, each of the eight essays deserves consideration on its own. ... her images are often poetic and her personal revelations can be striking ... the close read is worth the effort." [Boston Globe](#) "Savoy is a geologist at Mount Holyoke, but this *sui generis* creation, wherein John McPhee meets James Baldwin, dissolves all academic boundaries. *Trace* is a memoir, a meditation on landscape and identity, and a travelogue with a mission. 'As an Earth historian,' writes Savoy, 'I once sought the relics of deep time. To be an honest woman, I must trace other residues of hardness.' Digging for her family roots in America's tripartite legacy; natives, African slaves, and European settlers; she unearths some genealogy, but more fruitful are the connections she makes between philosophy, ecology, and race." [Vulture](#) "[An] illuminating treatise . . . 'Each told fact holds meaning to the recorder, and each historical narrative (re)presents accidental and deliberate silences or omissions,' Savoy writes. As she assuredly shows, these silences can be telling, reminding us to watch for bias, and that when it comes to interpreting history, the viewing lens is almost as important as the narrative." [Booklist](#) "In reverential, elegiac prose, Savoy ... meditates on the meaning of history and identity as related to place. Savoy's deep knowledge of the land opens up intriguing new avenues for exploring the multifaceted, tumultuous nature of American identity." [Publishers Weekly](#) "Savoy's well-researched account, which includes numerous lyric eyewitness descriptions of place, also delves into recently declassified National Archives records to note how prisoners of war 'expressed to the nurses their surprise that Americans would fight to preserve democracy abroad and at home exhibit prejudice to other Americans solely because of their skin color.' Springing from the literal Earth to metaphor, Savoy demonstrates the power of narrative to erase as easily as it reveals, yielding a provocative, eclectic exposé of the palimpsest historically defining the U.S."

as much as any natural or man-made boundary." #151;Kirkus Starred Review"Lauret Savoy's Trace is one of the most extraordinary books I've read in a long time, a book about landmarks#151;how the land is marked#151;that in itself may be something of a landmark. With searching, smart, arrestingly beautiful writing, she tells stories of places, their names, their layers, and the ways history covers, alters, shifts the stories of people within them. That she does so bringing race and ethnicity into it makes this an even more singular, vital, necessary book. Writing of her own family mysteries and wayfaring within larger racial, social, and cultural contexts in a way that is, at once, intimate and personal, and larger and more universal, Lauret Savoy has given us an invaluable work of better knowing our past, seeing our present, imagining our future." #151;Rick Simonson, Elliott Bay Book Company"Savoy...successfully leads readers on an illuminating journey through history#151;her own and her ancestors#151; U.S. native and nonnative peoples#151; and the country#151; via insights on varied American landscapes and cultural and personal narratives. Savoy#151;s immersive, accessible, and evocative narrative interweaves questions of morality, social justice, and stewardship of the land we call home with discussions of history and the American landscape and will interest readers of history, social science, and earth science." #151;Library Journal#147;Trace has passages of really exceptional beauty. I found myself marking sentences here and there, just for their poetry and depth. And the interweaving of Lauret Savoy#151;s awakening to geography#151;her own and the planet#151;is powerful and fresh.#151;C. S. Manegold, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of Ten Hills Farm#147;Trace is must-reading for anyone who cares still about life on earth right here and now. Heaven help those who follow. In her contemplative essay, Lauret Savoy locates, relocates and celebrates the majesty of America#151;s natural landscapes#133; her loving, exhaustless examination of American language alone distinguishes this quietly powerful, nuanced, well-lit reflection. Trace cuts more than one gleaming, sharp-toothed key to help unlock some of the hard questions that challenge and haunt the environmental and climate-change movements. Why does toxic waste get dumped onto poor neighborhoods, poor communities, debt-drowned nations? Why should any darker-skinned citizen feel vulnerable to violence or abuse while hiking or camping in America#151;s remote playgrounds or rural settings?#151;Al Young, former Poet Laureate of California, novelist, essayist"How does one find a home among ruins and shards? That might be the question that leads Lauret Savoy to follow traces of life#151;s past in landscapes, rivers, fossils and graveyards as she works to undo the silences of our nation#151;s wounded history. As an Earth historian, she reads the land with an informed eye. As a woman of mixed heritage, she reads into the land the

lives of enslaved laborers and displaced tribes. This is a work of conscience and moral conviction. Reading it I understood how the land holds the memory of our history and how necessary it is to listen to its many voices." &#151; Alison Hawthorne Deming, Author of *Zoologies: On Animals and the Human Spirit* "We have waited a very long time for "Trace" by Lauret Savoy. Too long. Her words are a stunning excavation and revelation of race, identity, and the American landscape. I have never read a more beautiful, smart, and vulnerable accounting of how we are shaped by memory in place. This braiding of personal history with geology and the systematic erasure of "Other" in pursuit of Manifest Destiny is a stratigraphy of conscience and consciousness. What Lauret Savoy creates on the page is as breathtaking as the view she saw as a child as she stood on the edge of the Grand Canyon with her parents and learned land does not hate, people do. I stand in awe of Lauret Savoy's wisdom and compassionate intelligence. Trace is a crucial book for our time, a bound sanity, not a forgiveness, but a reckoning." &#151; Terry Tempest Williams, author of *When Women Were Birds, Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, and *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* "With a voice that is both lyrical and authoritative, this important illuminating book might be thought of as a map, or a group of maps laid out edge to edge... This is a book that will promote and help shape our nation's urgent conversation bout race." &#151; John Elder, author of *Reading the Mountains of Home* and *Pilgrimage to Vallombrosa*, editor of the encyclopedia *American Nature Writers*, and co-editor of *The Norton Anthology of Nature Writing* "The personal manner and historical scenes are concise, explicit, and marvelous... the gentle deconstruction of the historical sources is truly moving, potent, and convincing." &#151; Gerald Vizenor, winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers Circle of the Americas "Lauret Savoy's writing reveals both the pain and the hope located in landscape, place, and name. It is a wonderfully powerful and deeply personal exploration of herself, through this American landscape." &#151; Julian Agyeman, author of *Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of Environmental Justice* "The narrator is an engaging figure, sharing with us her process of discovery, conveying her indignation without stridency (although stridency would have been justified), tracing her research, acknowledging her uncertainties, suggesting why this quest matters so deeply to herself and why it should matter to us." &#151; Scott Russell Sanders, author of *A Private History of Awe* and *A Conservationist Manifesto*

Lauret Savoy is a woman of mixed heritage, and a professor of environmental studies and geology at Mount Holyoke College, where she explores the intertwinings of natural and cultural histories. She writes about the stories we tell of the origins of the American land and the stories we tell of

ourselves in this land. Her books include *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity and the Natural World*; *Bedrock: Writers on the Wonders of Geology*; and *Living with the Changing California Coast*. She lives in Leverett, MA.

Thoughtful and loving despite descriptions of incidents that made me wince, Trace lays out the complicated history of origins, place names, honoring (or dishonoring) the ancestors. For instance, she has visited historic sites where the guides are uncomfortable discussing the slaves who worked there and were buried there, and she spends much of her journey around the US looking for origin stories her parents were uncomfortable telling her. After reading it, I donated it to my town's Multicultural Network library, it must be read, savored, shared.

The blurbs on the dust jacket are spot on so I will only add that this book really moved me, made me think about our history and the winners who wrote it, the histories we inherit from our parents (or not) and how these shape our way of seeing the world, how I fit into and relate to the place I call home, and how many layers of history personal/cultural/and geological overlay every locale in the USA. An honest, thoughtful, emotionally provoking and revealing, exploration of people and place across time. At times the content can be raw and tough, at others gentle and serene. The writing throughout is exceptional. Very highly recommended.

Excellent writing and a unique perspective on roots and birthright. One should really listen to the NPR interview with her where she also reads the prologue.

I really loved this book. The depth with which she builds her landscapes left me in awe and illustrated just how troubled our recent history is, while reminding me that it is part of a larger story. It was personal and introspective without being insular. It could be fairly dense, and will require another pass.

An incredible read- a book that will be cherished alongside the works of Leopold, Wendell Berry and Terry Tempest Williams. Highly recommended!

It's important to know how history has marked us as people and individuals. TRACE shows so clearly how this country's history has marked this society, the American land itself, and the author.

Terrific book. Family history blended with landscape history illuminating things that have been suppressed for too long

Although the reading is often dense, the methodology and the stories she tells along the way kept me engaged. She writes well and beautifully combines history, place and people on her quest.

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