

Information and Advance Praise

Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape

by Lauret Savoy

I. Catalog Copy

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. Gifted with this manifold vision, and graced by a scientific and lyrical diligence, she delves through fragmented histories -- natural, personal, cultural -- to find shadowy outlines of other stories of *place* in America.

Every landscape is an accumulation, reads one epigraph. *Life must be lived amidst that which was made before*. Courageously and masterfully, Lauret Savoy does so in this beautiful book: she *lives there*, making sense of this land and its troubled past, reconciling what it means to inhabit terrains of memory—and to be one. Though deeply personal, *Trace* concerns who we all are in this terrain called the United States, inviting readers to have a more honest understanding of history's impact in our lives.

II. Advance Praise

"Lauret Savoy's *Trace* is one of the most extraordinary books I've read in a long time, a book about landmarks—how the land is marked—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."

—Rick Simonson, Elliott Bay Book Company

"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.”

—Terry Tempest Williams, author of *When Women Were Birds*, *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, and *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*

“*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’s natural landscapes . . . 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’s remote playgrounds or rural settings?” Lauret Savoy reminds us: “Our lives take place.”

—Al Young, former Poet Laureate of California, novelist, and 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’s past in landscapes, rivers, fossils and graveyards as she works to undo the silences of our nation’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.”

—Alison Hawthorne Deming, author of *Zoologies: On Animals and the Human Spirit*

Lauret Savoy’s *Trace* may be the most relevant book published this fall. This lyrical and sweeping essay on race, memory, and the American landscape covers ground sadly neglected in much nature writing. Its ethical argument—that the way we treat the environment is inextricable from how we treat our fellow human beings (and vice versa)—is one we should all pay close attention to, now more than ever.

—Stephen Sparks, Green Apple Books

“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 about race.”

—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.”

—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.”

—Julian Agyeman, author of *Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of Environmental Justice* and other books on environmental and social 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.”

—Scott Russell Sanders, author of *A Private History of Awe* and *A Conservationist Manifesto*

“*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’s awakening to geography—her own and the planet’s—is powerful and fresh.”

—C. S. Manegold, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of *Ten Hills Farm*

“Savoy . . . successfully leads readers on an illuminating journey through history—her own and her ancestors’, U.S. native and nonnative peoples’, and the country’s, via insights on varied American landscapes and cultural and personal narratives. Savoy’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.”

—*Library Journal*