Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape
By Lauret Savoy

Winner of the 2016 American Book Award
Finalist for the 2016 PEN American Open Book Award, the William Saroyan Prize, & the Phillis Wheatley Book Award

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" *. . . this sui generis creation, **wherein John McPhee meets James Baldwin**, dissolves all academic boundaries.*" Vulture, New York Magazine

In the words of Terry Tempest Williams, "*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 . . .* **Trace** *is a crucial book for our time.*"

In this powerful and provocative meditation on place, race, and the unvoiced presence of the past, Lauret Savoy explores how the country's still unfolding history marks a person, a people, and the land itself. A woman of African American, Euro-American, and Native American heritage, she weaves together human stories of migration, displacement, and erasure with personal journeys across a continent and time. From twisted terrain within the San Andreas Fault zone to a South Carolina plantation, from national parks to burial grounds, from "Indian Territory" to the origin of names on the land, and from the U.S.–Mexico border to the U.S. capital, *Trace* counters some of our oldest and most damaging public silences by revealing often-unrecognized ties, such as the siting of Washington, DC, and the economic motives of slavery. None of these links is coincidental. Few appear in public history. All touch us.

"*Trace* **is a very important book**—for me, and for the wider field or terrain of landscape-and-memory. Delicate in its thinking, and bold in its style and form. And so subtle in the way Lauret Savoy lets earth-processes and emotional/historical processes illuminate one another as metaphors, without subordinating either to the other by means of a system as fixed as allegory. Erosion . . . silting . . . flow . . . concealment . . . exposure . . . I relished seeing through her different beholding eyes, in their several forms of 'difference.'" —Robert Macfarlane, author of *Landmarks* and *Mountains of the Mind*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Lauret Savoy is a professor of environmental studies and geology at Mount Holyoke College. 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.

PRAISE FOR *TRACE*:

" . . . 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."
—*New York Magazine, Vulture*, 1 of 7 Books You Need to Read

"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 *The Hour of Land* and *Refuge*

"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

"*Trace* is **must-reading for anyone who cares still about life on earth right here and now**. Heaven help those who follow . . . A rigorous editor and scholar, Savoy looks closely at official grandeur, while she sifts through traces of history that come with any territory so-named. Lauret Savoy's *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."
—Al Young, Former Poet Laureate of California

"*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*

"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 (for Literary Hub Booksellers Fall Preview)

PRAISE FOR *TRACE* CONTINUED:

"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*

"**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 *Imagining the Earth* and *Reading the Mountains of Home*

"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." —*Kirkus,* Starred Review

"In **reverential, elegiac prose**, Savoy . . . meditates of 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*

"What if written history bears no trace of our existence, our contribution to the land? What do these silences speak of and bear witness to? Savoy's **illuminating treatise** teases apart these questions as she traces her family's African heritage . . . 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*

"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**." —*Huffington Post,* One of the Most Notable Non-Fiction Books You Might've Missed This Year

"**I'm thankful that *Trace* found me. Sometimes great reads do that**." —Robert Gray, contributing editor *Shelf Awareness Pro*

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PRAISE FOR *TRACE* CONTINUED

"This book is **a brilliant and unique musing on American history and landscape**. Lauret Savoy is a mixed race woman and professor of geology and environmental studies . . . Inevitably the role of race in American history is part of her family's history. Savoy details the inaccuracies, silences, and omissions throughout American history, including the Black Codes in Washington D.C. and South Carolina, land grabs from Mexico and Native peoples, segregation at Fort Huachuca, and the disappearance of African American towns in Oklahoma. **An important book as we struggle to understand and overcome the wrongs of American history and the impact on our current lives**." —Joan Grenier, Odyssey Books

"Her stories may not be happy — but they are **essential reading for anyone who cares about place and people in the United States of America**."—*The Recorder*

"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*

"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, author of *Manifest Manners* and 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 *Sharing Cities: A Case for Truly Smart and Sustainable Cities*

"**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 *The Paradise of Bombs* and *A Private History of Awe*

" . . . **[A]n interesting and important work** . . . [H]er images are often **poetic** and her personal revelations can be **striking** . . . the close read is worth the effort." —*The Boston Globe*

"In **blazing, beautiful prose, unblinkingly researched and reported**, Savoy explores how the country's still unfolding history, along with ideas of "race," have marked her and the land. She also traces, in a mosaic of journeys across a continent and time, her mixed-blood ancestry, carefully taking apart the frame at dovetail joints, curiously inspecting and turning over the smallest points of connection, omission, dislocation, and break."
—Catherine Buni, *Los Angeles Review of Books* (January 10, 2016)