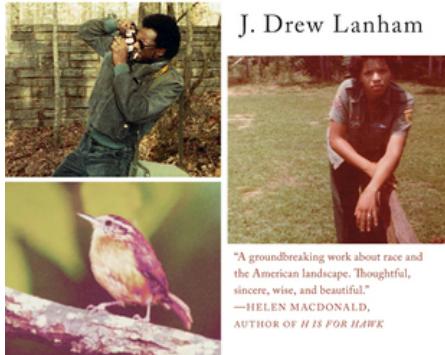




THE HOME PLACE

Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature



"A groundbreaking work about race and the American landscape, 'thoughtful, sincere, wise, and beautiful.'"
—HELEN MACDONALD,
AUTHOR OF *H IS FOR HAWK*

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J. Drew Lanham

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“In me, there is the red of miry clay, the brown of spring floods, the gold of ripening tobacco. All of these hues are me; I am, in the deepest sense, colored.” From these fertile soils of love, land, identity, family, and race emerges *The Home Place*, a big-hearted, unforgettable memoir by ornithologist and professor of ecology J. Drew Lanham.

Dating back to slavery, Edgefield County, South Carolina—a place “easy to pass by on the way somewhere else”—has been home to generations of Lanhams. In *The Home Place*, readers meet these extraordinary people, including Drew himself, who over the course of the 1970s falls in love with the natural world around him. As his passion takes flight, however, he begins to ask what it means to be “the rare bird, the oddity.”

By turns angry, funny, elegiac, and heartbreakng, *The Home Place* is a remarkable meditation on nature and belonging, at once a deeply moving memoir and riveting exploration of the contradictions of black identity in the rural South—and in America today.

The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature Details

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From Reader Review The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature for online ebook

John Moore says

Few books have been as enjoyable to read as The Home Place. Lanham, a master storyteller, writes beautifully about his homeplace and his life experience. It is a particular story with broad appeal. Lanham loves nature and his telling of his story draws the reader into their own love affair with nature. The Home Place is also a telling of the story of race in America. I was particularly moved by Lanham's attempt to connect with his family's history, a story with roots in slavery. Lanham, and his family, have roots in the soil, history and culture of South Carolina. Lanham, in one self description:

I am an ornithologist, wildlife ecologist, and college professor. I am a father, husband, son, and brother. I hope to some I am a friend. I bird. I hunt. I gather. I am a seeker and a noticer. I am a lover. My being finds its foundation in open places. I'm a man of color—

Highly recommended.

Misti says

I can't begin to express how much I loved this book! I took my time with it and really savored it.

Melissa Matthewson says

I enjoyed the perspective, the point of view, the geography and landscape, the narrator's humor. I'm teaching it in my spring nature writing course and we've had some very important and thoughtful conversations about nature, race, and identity. Highly recommend the book!

Trish Remley says

This book was an easy 4 star rating for me, but the last four chapters elevated it to 5 stars. I am of somewhat similar age as Mr. Lanham and could relate to many of his childhood memories concerning events, tv shows, having parents as teachers and the importance of education, and BB guns of the time. Although I spent much of my summer time in a camp house my dad built in Maine with an outhouse, running around the woods, working in my grandparents vegetable garden, and swimming in the ocean, the majority of my childhood was spent in the suburbs of a small city in Western Massachusetts. It really wasn't until my adult life that I took a real interest and appreciation in nature. Mr Lanham's retelling of his childhood through adult life with his love of nature running through it was wonderful. The descriptions & telling of his family members gave me a real picture of each of their beings. As a fellow birder, I never really thought about who birds and who is out in nature and who is not. But the last four chapters connecting his last name and ancestry of southern black America to the same last name of the southern white Americans in his own county was eye opening.

Two churches/one name. Please read it. Being white and not from the south, I know I do not understand, but Mr. Lanham helps me to. All very upsetting. And as Mr Lanham alludes to, slavery may be a reason why there aren't as many people of color out there birding & loving nature. I missed a chance to hear him in Lawrence, KS and I really regret that.

Dottie Head says

Wonderful book about J. Drew Lanham's experience growing up as an African American in rural South Carolina. A poignant tale of place and nature, his descriptions of the natural landscape read like poetry. It's a beautiful book to read.

Elizabeth says

This book feels like a generous gift - so personal and insightful and amazing. I hope to read parts of it again before it's due back at the library.

Emma Hanlin says

The content of this book is fascinating and crucial in the white-dominated field of environmental studies. Lanham focuses on his upbringing in a farm in South Carolina, the "Home Place," exploring how his connection to the land directed the course of his future and was complicated by the past (read: slavery). He writes about becoming an ornithologist despite feeling as though this wasn't something black boys did, the struggles of birding in the rural South as a man of color, his search to find his genealogy and discover how his ancestors came to Edgefield, his choice to change his degree from engineering to zoology before his senior year of college, and other experiences and influences that directed his life. The story of Lanham's life, family, and career kept me intrigued throughout the book. He gives great insight into how to make environmentalism a more inclusive field and why African Americans might struggle to feel connected to the land.

The writing style of the book, however, is a barrier to enjoying the content. The language is flowery, synonyms are used in confusing ways, there is a new metaphor in almost every paragraph, and there are countless allusions and cliches that don't seem intentional. Granted, Lanham is an ornithologist, not a writer, and it's a little difficult to criticize a memoir ("How DARE you interpret your own life in that way?"), but as a reader the experience was a little exhausting.

Scott Neuffer says

Perhaps the most monumental book I've read or reviewed about race relations in America. Lanham, a black naturalist, birder, and professor, shares his fond memories of his beloved family ranch in South Carolina. His land ethic, stemming from Leopold, Carson, and other conservationist luminaries, is unique in that it addresses a segment of the population historically dispossessed of land. His accounts of racism in the South are harrowing, while his passages on nature are gorgeous. This is a significant read in many ways, deepening

our understanding of race in America but also the continued importance of forward-looking conservation.

Wendalina says

I caught the tail end of a show on NPR that featured J. Drew Lanham speaking. He'd written an essay, Birding While Black, and also this book, *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*. I can't recall what he said specifically in the two minutes of the interview that I'd heard, but I was intrigued and I tracked down this book. What a sense of place he creates. Everything is so vivid. It's a real treat to read someone who is so observant share it all with you. The birds, the trees, the cows, the bugs, his home place, his family - I feel like I've been to Edgefield, South Carolina. A taste of his words and his view on his world: "Before I got too deep into the woods, I might take a few minutes to lie in the pasture lane, enticing the 'buzzards' to investigate. I lay as still as I could and did my best imitation of something stinking and dead. Once or twice the ruse worked and I could almost count the feathers in the broad black wings and seethe bare red heads twisting to investigate before my nerve shriveled. I miraculously revived to run away before the vultures could peck my eyes out, like Mamatha had warned me they'd do. I felt closer to flight by bringing the birds nearer to my earthbound existence. Watching those scavengers tracing circles in the sky was hypnotic. I often wished we could trade places, that I could sail as effortlessly on the wind as they did." (excerpted from the section, *Flock*, chapter titled, *The Home Place*, which is also the name of the book). I'm grateful to have caught that 2 minutes on NPR so that I could hear about J Drew Lanham and find this book. It was so interesting and so beautifully written. Makes me want to get outside. Also eye opening to what it's like to be a black man out in nature, and on lands nurtured by slave labor. I'm not always drawn in to read history, so it was nice to get the history by way of an author who loves and appreciates nature so much. Very good book.

Shirley nature says

Lanham shares lyrically-written stories, deep connections to family, his strong sense of place, a passion for nature, and optimism and humor, along with the frustration of being the uncommon African American ornithologist in a predominantly white field. Every reader will be inspired and feel these connections. I highly recommend this book to book clubs!

Link to my interview with the author:

<https://lplks.org/blogs/post/j-drew-1...>

Simone says

I read this because J. Drew Lanham was coming to Lawrence to give a talk. Sadly we ended up leaving town that afternoon and I wasn't able to make it to the talk, which is too bad because I liked this book. It was both meditative and lyrical, and I like the subjects. It also worked for the Book Riot 2018 challenge - read a book about nature.

Dianne says

Such a satisfying book, capturing how the author and all of us fall in love with nature while roaming free as children. Lanham is funny and wise as he shares his journey as a black man in rural SC, academia and the world of ornithology and birding.

Melki says

Nature seems worthy of worship.

Lanham, a Professor of Wildlife Ecology at Clemson University, presents a wonderful gift - the story of his boyhood spent mostly outdoors in Edgefield, South Carolina. He pays tribute to his family's homestead, and its remarkable inhabitants - his strong grandmother, and schoolteacher parents. But mostly, the book is filled with homages to the beauty of nature. There's so much wonderful writing here, it was hard to pick out just a few passages, but as one who spent many a lovely Sunday morning held prisoner in church, this one struck a chord:

There was no air conditioning in the church for a long time. That meant that it was hot, sometimes hellishly so. The place where Jesus and his angry father lived to help me get into paradise wasn't even comfortable. The pictures on the church fans - Martin Luther King Jr.'s intensely kind gaze; the detached but perfectly poised (and suspiciously white) praying hands; and my favorite, the perfect little white country church nestled in autumn splendor -were minor but welcome distractions that helped to pass the hours. Was there another tortured, starving black boy, I wondered, sitting in the perfect little church, forever imprisoned in the fan's flat dimensions? Surely it was cooler in there. The leafy riot of red and yellow framing the little chapel looked like October should feel. I could imagine the frosty morning, smell the ripening season, hear the honking geese overhead. Were the brilliant colors of the leaves against the perfect blue sky what heaven looked like? I hoped so. I dreamed of that place. Not the little church - or even heaven - but the brilliant landscape and the wild perfection that surrounded it. My God lived out there.

This book had much in common with Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* and *Sketches Here and There*, a title that helped awaken the author's interest in his surroundings. In addition to his childhood memories, Lanham also discusses his adult life spent observing nature, including a funny, yet somewhat harrowing chapter on birding while black:

... here I am, on stop number thirty-two of the Laurel Falls Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) route: a large black man in one of the whitest places in the state, sitting on the side of the road with binoculars pointed toward a house with the Confederate flag proudly displayed. Rambling trucks passing by, a honking horn or two, and curious double-takes are infrequent but still distract me from the task at hand. Maybe there's some special posthumous award given for dying in the line of duty on a BBS route ...

On mornings like this I sometimes question why I choose to do such things. Was I crazy to take this route, up here, so far away from anything? What if someone in the house is not so keen on having a black man out here, maybe checking out things - or people - he shouldn't be? I've heard that some mountain folks don't like nosy outsiders poking around. Yet here I am, a black man birding.

This is simply a joy to read, offering a look back, a glance at the future, and an awestruck, wide-eyed examination of the magnificence that surrounds us.

It was a universe where wonder and awe had yet to be tossed from the temple by science and cynicism. There was way more to heaven and earth than could be dreamed back then. It was a different world, one I sometimes wish I could revisit.

Tama Filipas says

As a teen and twenty-something I read loads of great nature writing from the 50s and 60s, and Lanham's style is definitely reminiscent of those years. I woke early this morning just to read before I went to work, and now I can't wait until the day is done so I can pick up that book again

A gorgeous, gentle memoir. I'm only halfway through, but this is already the best book I've read this year, surpassing 'Lab Girl' by a smidge.

Jen says

Like Drew Lanham himself, this book is big-hearted, funny, generous, and grounded in a deep love for the natural world. Aldo Leopold famously described how landowners write their signatures on the face of the land as they make management choices. In this memoir about growing up in rural South Carolina, Drew Lanham shows us how the land writes its own signature on us. This signature, part of the "colored" identity of Lanham, is revealed in these pages as indelible in ways that are deeply tied to family and memory. It represents ties that concurrently bind us and guide us forward, forever shaping the people we are, the choices we make, and the understanding we have of the world. As you meet the Lanham clan and travel through Drew's youthful explorations of the "Home Place," you'll feel the gentle press of the crayons too. They will fill in places in your heart that may have faded from memory, but nonetheless bind us together in the common ground of family, freedom, coming of age, and love. This is a must-read for any lover of nature or of great nature writing. One of the best things I read this year.
