

★ **A Darker Wilderness: Black Nature Writing from Soil to Stars**

Erin Sharkey, Editor

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A Darker Wilderness is a remarkable collection of essays regarding generational experiences of the natural world.

These ten essays expand the boundaries of nature writing with emotive narratives from brown, Black, and queer perspectives. They are about what it is like to interact with plants, wildlife, and other people; they muse on the definitions of the natural landscape itself. Most are framed around photographs of people or objects, with one notable exception. Each touchstone's significance is imparted, helping to bind the essays into the anthology's thoughtful framework.

Some essays are tender and quiet; others are forceful calls to action; still others uncover natural magic in unsuspecting places. Each is creative and revelatory. Their writers relate family stories and consider how slavery, Jim Crow laws, redlining, USDA policies, and racism kept people from owning land and traveling safely in the rural US.

Naima Penniman's eloquent, passionate contribution recalibrates fraught relationships with nature, claiming "the spiritual power and physical protection" of forests and agricultural lands while rejecting extractive, discriminatory, and unsustainable policies and practices. The stories of under recognized Black historical figures and artists appear, including those of writer Audre Lorde, Revolutionary War veteran Austin Dabney, polymath and inventor Benjamin Banneker, and Haitian healer, Vodou priest, and revolt leader Francois Mackandal; the ways that nature nourished their bodies and spirits, giving them freedoms denied by society, are covered.

Of note is Ronald C. Greer II's incandescent "Magic Alley," which describes a Detroit neighborhood that seemed populated by magical winos and "powder people" in childhood; as an adult, the same description of Greer's natural world was a gut punch. Elsewhere, Katie Robinson explores how they transformed their paralyzing fear of aliens into a source of love and wonder with grace and immediacy.

A Darker Wilderness is an important, masterful collection of American nature writing.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (January / February 2023)

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