

Welcome to Thoughts from Home. Your conservation podcast from the National Conservation Training Center. We're located along the Potomac River, an historic Shepherdstown, West Virginia and our home to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service throughout this series. We'll be talking with experts, authors and a variety of other guests to bring you the most up to date information, events and happenings here at the National Conservation Training Center. Thanks for listening and we hope you enjoy.

My name is Catherine Woodward and I'm a Fish and Wildlife biologist in the USFWS Conservation Library, which is home to over 2,700 journals, 11,000 print and e-books, 28,000 high quality images and much more. One of our initiatives as a library is to inspire you and other readers to connect with conservation literature and nature writing both classic and contemporary through America's Wild Read. Our virtual quarterly book club. We will be pulling a book from the shelves of our library and I'll give a brief overview of it pulling out some main themes and highlights as well as connecting you with conservation literature.

Today's episode of Off the Shelf we'll be talking about the Homeplace Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature written by Dr. J. Drew Lanham, a distinguished professor from Clemson University and a native from Edgefield, South Carolina. He is a birder, naturalist, hunter, conservationist and author of essays poetry and Homeplace. This book was voted best Scholarly Book of the Decade by the Chronicle of Higher Education. It's a beautiful memoir which may remind you Aldo Leopold Sand County Almanac. Memoirs are all about creating understanding, telling a slice of your story so that others can relate and reflect and Lanham has done just that written to all who wonder and love the land the homeplace pieces together the memories of the people and places that shaped Lanham's identity as a man of color a scientist, a lover of nature and as he says in the book "The rare bird the oddity appreciated by some for his different perspective and discounted by others as an unnecessary nuisance. And unusually colored fish out of water." But in his admiration of wild things he learns from them a better and wilder way to be wild, to be free, unashamed and accepted his memories of his family and nature in Edgefield, South Carolina shaped this award winning book in his book. He asks the questions Where do I come from? Who are my people? Why does my blood run wild?

One theme we see in this book is the sense of home and homeplace. What does home mean to you? Is it a place you feel welcome valued? Surrounded by the people you love? Is it a place that's tied with memories of the landscape? Plants and animals that you grew curious about the National Conservation Training Center is considered the home of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We're located in Shepherdstown, West Virginia along the Potomac River with a walking campus on a five hundred thirty three acre property in CTC is the state of the art facility and the conservation community where the history and heritage of the service are preserved and shared. It's a place for us to come together to gain valuable skills for working on the job to collaborate and proactively solve challenges conservation. The trainings professional development resources and network we offer better equip and support the service in accomplishing the agency's mission. For Lanham, home was the rural town of Edgefield, South Carolina where the loblolly pine is everywhere and the white tailed deer are abundant. He unfolds the story of home before our eyes by using vivid language that takes us to his home. Their ranch was a 1970s dwelling and nothing spectacular a comfortable place that his mom and dad worked hard to build. He says it was a buffer from the outside world. The things inside a home like the pictures hung on a wall. Our favorite coffee mugs, good food and the comfort of our own bed. They make a home more enjoyable and a good place to live. Home reminds him of the wildlife and habitat he grew up exploring as a boy. Home is about family. It's dad's hard work. Growing a lot of produce and laboring on their farm

being resourceful with what they had. It's taking care of his grandmother Mantha and smelling the sweet aromas of her buttermilk biscuits and home cooked meals. It's his brother and sisters and their memories shared in Lantern's book. He packs the pages with personal memories which shows just how strong they are tied to the word home. It's where your memories lie no matter the age or how many miles away returning home can flood us with nostalgia on the good ol days.

Reading through this book, his memoir motivates the reader to turn the pages evoking feelings by connecting with our emotions. One emotional journey he takes us on is how growing up as a person of color has shaped who he is today. Conservationists of color is another theme that we see. Flight was Lantern's first fascination from a young age Dre Drew Lanham found a connection to nature. He was fascinated by birds and their ability to fly. They can fly by their hollow bones so light and strong their feathers and their wings which are shaped perfectly for catching the air. Their lungs are efficient so they can fly long distances. Birds are astounding and practically everywhere on land and on oceans you can find them over open seas along the coastline in fresh water and on land virtually in every habitat from urban areas to vast open wilderness from the lowest desert to the highest mountains. Birds are beautifully diverse. At seven years old he bought his first field guide to learn about birds and how to identify them. He grew up to be an ornithologist.

Wildlife ecologist and college professor who's colored skin has cast his love affair with nature in the shadow of birding while black is another theme that we see in this book. Lanham describes a series of incidents where he felt unsafe because of his race in remote places and offers that more people of color and wildlife management in biology, more people of color in birding and outdoor recreation is a solution, he says turning oddities into commonplace in our virtual book club. America's Wild Read we talked about how extremely moving this chapter was hoping more people would read it because it would help others understand the challenges people of color face in the outdoors. The work to make outdoor spaces and our workplaces feel safer and more welcoming to people of color starts with giving people of color support to share their stories. If more people heard and felt stories like Dr. Lantern's they would have enriched awareness and feel personally motivated to make outdoor spaces and workplaces more welcoming.

Another theme and challenge that Lanham has given us is doing what's best by nature. Lanham reminds us about outer Leopold's land ethic and how we are all stewards of our own homeplace Aldo Leopold wrote in a sand county Almanac. The land ethic changes the role from sapiens, from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies his respect for fellow members and also respect for the community as such. Lanham writes his father's management of their homestead and his selection of trees cut down for their subsistence was an illustration of a land ethic being practiced. How can we apply the land ethic to our own spaces? What is your role in the natural community of your home? Think of the possibilities. If we all practice land ethic, rewilding our spaces, growing native plants, practicing recycling and reusing planting pollinator gardens, trees and shrubs, building bird feeders or bug hotels and bat boxes slowing down on roads for wildlife crossings, composting your own soil. These are all simple ways to pitch in and make your own backyard wildlife friendly. We each follow our own paths. We are who and what we are because of our paths our lives shape and mold us. We all have a role in conservation and we the U.S. fish and Wildlife Service share a mission to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

We all depend on an act the stewards for the same resources no matter where we grew up, where we live or where we work. Conversations about home identity, race and our differences can help foster understanding and unity and a better world reading through this book. It's so easy to connect with his story. Whether our experiences growing up parallel Lantern's in some way, whether rural upbringing, growing up with religion as a family value, finding a connection to nature from a young age Lanham shares his vivid childhood memories and how they have shaped who he is today. The homeplace allows the reader to reminisce with him and think on their own story and upbringing. Reflecting on home, childhood, past, present and what's to come our paths conservationists require that we restrike the trail. Conservation must be more. It has to become proactive passion. Our time is now. Let's improve the possibilities for future generations. Let's leave our natural resources and its natural inhabitants better off than we found them. I hope we can nurture others to care and stand up for wild things in wild places. Let's color the conversation of conservation literature.

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