

Reclaiming space: “Afros in Nature”

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Environment](#) November 1, 2020

🌿 Latest in a series of posts on the environment 🌿

Afros in Nature

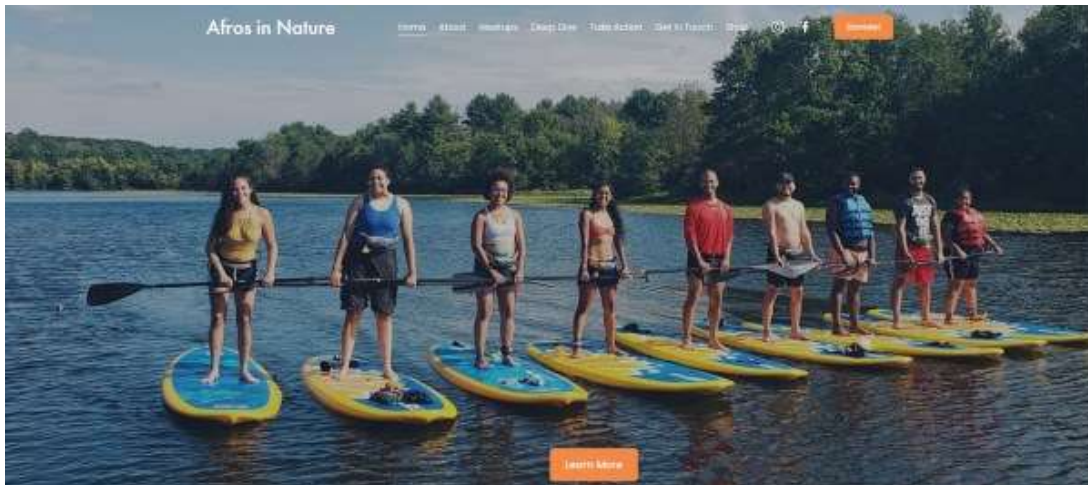
ref: **“Does race affect feelings of belonging on the D&L trail?”**

What are you up to this Sunday afternoon?

Exercising, recreating outside? Kinda lousy for that, Gadfly guesses.

Football game? It’s half-time of the first game. Spend a minute on this post.

Gadfly promised a surprise yesterday. At least he thinks it will be a surprise. Here tiz.



A group called **“Afros in Nature”** founded by Melanie Lino, who operates **Lit** on 3rd St., a place we probably all know.

“Founded in Bethlehem, Afros in Nature is a grassroots collective to connect Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) with nature. . . . Working in groups, Afros in Nature brings BIPOC back to their roots in the great outdoors. We are taking a pastime historically dominated by white culture and showing BIPOC how to take advantage of its benefits for themselves, for the betterment of their health and well

being, and the improvement of our community as a whole. We are teaching BIPOC how to find healing and wholeness again in nature and in one another. . . . Afros in Nature is committed to addressing mental health concerns through nature-based healing and therapeutic activities, including hikes, nature walks, communal gardening, and sustainable food cultivation.”



In the recent “Race and Space in the Lehigh Valley” program hosted by the [Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium](#), Lino describes the founding of Afros in Nature, some of its activities (such as working with the local Coalition for Appropriate Transportation on a biking outing), and its purpose. She was not allowed to go out into the woods as a kid — maternal fear because of race? — and didn’t learn to enjoy nature till her 20s. Realizing how nature, the outdoors can give you a sense of healing, during the racial unease of the past summer Lino decided to serve her community by organizing this group. She has experienced reclaiming space and connection with the land at times/places where they were looked at, stared at as if they didn’t belong. Where they were not felt included. (4mins.)

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Gadfly must admit that hearing Lino talk and learning of her organization made him reflect upon his whiteness in a way he never did before.

Gadfly felt blindsided. Came out of nowhere.

Gadfly frequents the trails a lot. He just finished the Tail on the Trail challenge at twice the basic goal, spreading his sweat around a half-dozen of the local sites.

He has always thought of the trails as places of harmony and beauty — as egalitarian spaces — as “other worlds.” He tries to make eye contact with everyone he passes. He nods his head hello while biking. He flicks his handlebar’d fingers like blinking his car lights.

He almost fainted early in the summer to see a policeman on a bike on the Saucon Trail. So out of place. Crime does not happen here. Evil not permitted. Had seen nothing like it in all his years there.

How could African Americans, any POC not feel “at home” there?

Are you ready for one more jolt? Will only take a minute. Gadfly damn near pooped his pants on this one.

An African American Lafayette professor probably talking about Easton’s Arts Trail.

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Enjoy the second half, my white brothers and sisters, if you can.