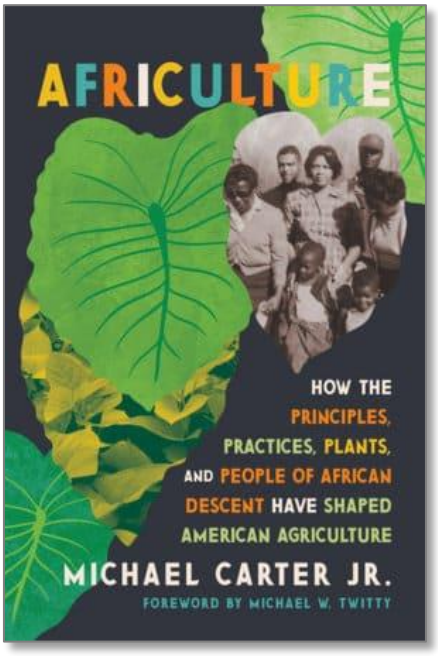
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Africonnections: Seeds of memory, roots of survival

Book review by
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Through *Africulture: How the Principles, Practices, Plants, and People of African Descent Have Shaped American Agriculture*, Michael Carter Jr. is building a bridge that many Black, African, and African American farmers, agriculturists, and future generations have long been waiting for—a bridge that makes it possible to see ourselves reflected in agricultural spaces. Myself included. This is not easy work. With the records of those kidnapped and enslaved in the Americas missing, fragmented, or deliberately erased, the work of reconnecting begins with the seeds that traveled here through the hands and knowledge of the enslaved.

The plants that grow in American soil tell a story of violence, but they also tell a story of resilience, fortitude, and deep agronomic knowledge. My ancestors, Carter Jr.'s ancestors, and the ancestors of countless Black Americans came here against their will and endured unimaginable suffering. Yet, through narratives like Carter Jr.'s, their stories live again. They reveal how the knowledge and labor of enslaved Africans shaped American agriculture, even as colonizers refused to acknowledge the depth of their expertise or the fullness of their humanity.

Carter Jr.'s work invites us to reconsider what has been lost, what has survived, and what continues to grow—and it challenges us to recognize

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Black agricultural knowledge as foundational, rather than peripheral to the story of American farming. I encourage you not only to journey through *Africulture* alongside this review, but to open the book yourself and sit with the stories held between its pages.

A blending of memoir, historical recollection, and meditation on past, present, and future, *Africulture* guides readers through the intertwined histories of the Carter family, enslaved Africans, and the agricultural life that shaped Michael Carter Jr. himself. Throughout the book, Carter Jr. returns to the core principles of Africulture, a pedagogy (predating and the basis of the book *Africulture*) he developed in order to educate, connect, and uplift the agricultural knowledge of people of African descent (Africulture, 2026). Rooted in a mission to challenge the stigmas born from the transatlantic kidnapping and enslavement of Africans, Africulture weaves a web linking African crops, folklore, cultural memory, nutrition, stewardship, and generational health. These principles ground the narrative, revealing Africulture not only as a historical framework but as a living pathway toward increasing Black farmers, agrarians, environmentalists, and land stewards. Through Carter Jr.'s storytelling, Africulture emerges as both remembrance and reclamation: a reminder that Black agricultural wisdom is not peripheral, but foundational to the story of American farming.

Rather than offering a linear, chapter-by-chapter history, *Africulture* uses the metaphorical language of plant life—seeds, soil, roots, leaves, fruit—to build an argument about the endurance and brilliance of African agricultural knowledge. Carter Jr. shows that the seeds carried by enslaved Africans were not only botanical but cultural, intellectual, and spiritual, and formed the foundation of agricultural practices in the Americas. By tracing how people and plants adapted, suffered, resisted, and flourished across generations, he demonstrates that Black agricultural identity is not a relic of enslavement but a living inheritance. The book's structure reinforces this point: each stage of plant growth becomes a lens for understanding how African-descended people have been uprooted, transplanted, composted, and encouraged to leaf and fruit again despite systemic barriers. Through personal narrative, historical reflection, and the principles of Africulture, Carter Jr. argues that reclaiming this heritage is essential for increasing the number of Black farmers, strengthening community health, and challenging the persistent stigmas that distance Black Americans from agriculture. In this way, *Africulture* succeeds not only as a story of one family but as a call to recognize Black agronomic knowledge as foundational to American farming and vital to its future.

Michael Carter Jr.'s work stands in conversation with a long lineage of scholarship that foregrounds African agricultural expertise, including Judith Carney's *Black Rice* (2001), Peter Wood's research on enslaved labor systems (2024), and Daniel Littlefield's work on African agronomic knowledge (1991). These scholars demonstrate that Africans were targeted during the transatlantic slave trade precisely because of their skill in rice cultivation, irrigation, and seed stewardship—challenging narratives that once framed enslaved people as unskilled labor. More recent studies continue to dismantle these distortions by highlighting the ecological innovations, crop systems, and foodways that enslaved Africans introduced and adapted under conditions of extreme violence. Complementary works by Michael Twitty (2017) and Jason Porter (2025) show how seeds, culinary practices, and ecological knowledge function as cultural memory, preserving evidence of African innovation across generations (see also Carney & Rosomoff, 2009).

Even with this supporting literature, *Africulture* takes on a life of its own. Carter Jr.'s narrative is not simply an academic contribution—it is a lived one. His writing embeds rich history within personal experience, strengthening the book's argument by grounding it in the realities of a Black agriculturalist whose family has carried this knowledge across generations.

If we do not reflect on past inequities, traumas, and erasures, there is no way to move forward. *Africulture* makes clear that the violence of kidnapping and enslavement also carried ecological knowledge, agricultural diversity, and a resilient people whose hands remain in the soil of American agriculture. To fully understand what agriculture in the United States is—and how it came to be—we

must acknowledge and support the descendants of those whose expertise built it. Carter Jr. calls readers to do exactly this: to make space for Black farmers, to recognize their agricultural heritage as foundational rather than peripheral, and to ensure that the next generation of Black agrarians can take up space in fields where their ancestors were once denied humanity. In this way, *Africulture* is not only a book but an invitation to participate in a more honest, equitable, and rooted agricultural future. 

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