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Sep+Oct 2014

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By Cassandra Overby

# Changing the Face of the Outdoors

Q&A with author James Edward Mills

James Edward Mills is an outdoors journalist, the creator/producer of The Joy Trip Project ([joytripproject.com](http://joytripproject.com)) and the author of *The Adventure Gap*, a new book set to be released by Mountaineers Books in October 2014. In it, Mills chronicles Expedition Denali, the first all-African-American summit attempt on Alaska's Mount Denali and creates a compelling case for all Americans to embrace their place in the great outdoors. We spoke with Mills about the book; below is a short selection from that conversation. To read more from the conversation, visit [wta.org/adventuregap](http://wta.org/adventuregap).

## Q: What is the adventure gap?

**A:** We've often heard of the education gap, the prosperity gap and the technology gap. But one of the things I realized through the course of my personal experience, as well as my career, is that there is a very comparable divide when it comes to people of color and participation in outdoor recreation. I call that the adventure gap.

## Q: Why is the issue of underexposure to the outdoors one that affects us all?

**A:** By 2042, it's predicted that the majority of the U.S. population will be non-white. If nothing happens to change the disparity between those who spend time in nature and those who don't, we'll have a constituency of voters in this country that have little or no relationship with the outdoors. Long term, that means when it comes time to allocate funding or cast votes for environmental preservation, there will be very few people who will work to protect wilderness.

## Q: When it comes to closing the adventure gap, how can everyday people be part of the solution?

**A:** I think it's important that people are aware of the difficulties and limitations that other people have. We all need to do whatever we can to support one another, and stop telling others (and ourselves) that there are things we can't do—especially when it comes to very impressionable people at young ages. It speaks to the concept of vocational training. We need guides. We need environmental scientists. We need foresters. We need people whose job it is to spend time in nature. And I think we should stop telling each other that that career path is a dead end.

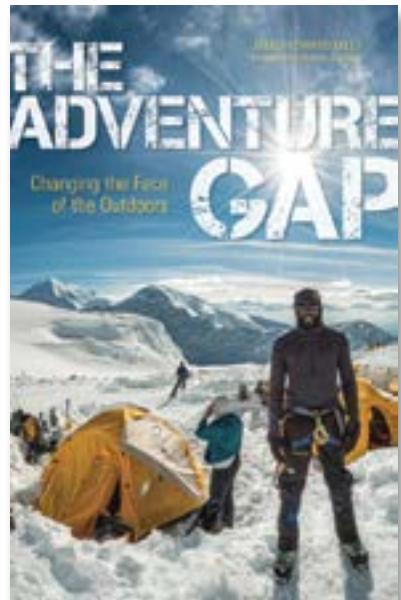
## Q: If people could walk away from your book with one thing, what would you want it to be?

**A:** More than anything else, I want people to understand that this isn't exclusively an issue of race. This is a conversation about everyone's adventure gap and getting more people outside. We all deal with some type of barrier. For some, it's institutionalized racism. For others, it's a disability. Oftentimes, it's just us telling ourselves that we can't do something. I want people to break down those barriers.

**Recommendation:**  
4/5



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## An American Ascent

To experience the drama and adventure of Expedition Denali on film—with video diaries, breathtaking views of Denali and one-on-one interviews—check out *An American Ascent*. The documentary is co-produced by James Edward Mills (author of *The Adventure Gap*) and is expected to debut on the adventure film circuit in November. Public screenings and distribution of the film will follow.  
**Watch the trailer at [vimeo.com/84572192](http://vimeo.com/84572192).**



Photo by Hudson Henry