

ABSTRACT

What are we trying to understand when we engage difference in our work? Drawing on my new book, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans and the Great Outdoors* I consider the challenges of capturing the multi-dimensionality of lived difference not easily recognized or articulated by disciplinary ways of knowing. I reflect on alternate empirical and theoretical possibilities and practices: Risk-taking as a form of rigor, Informed Improvisation, Embodied practice. Reflexive innovation. When I sit down with my research, all the data collected and the knowledge gleaned, what does engaging difference require of me? What am I willing to risk in the telling? As my research makes its way through the academic machinery of knowledge production how is “difference” projected and protected?

The way we engage difference empirically and theoretically not only re-inscribes certain ways of thinking about difference, but also reaffirms certain processes of valuation that measure “good” knowledge. I’d like to consider new configurations, new ways of seeing people, places, and things, particularly when we use “difference” as an organizing concept to better understand human-environment relationships. Creativity demands standing in the tension of what we “know” and what is yet possible. Engaging difference demands something different – how do we create a space for that difference on its own terms, in order to generate something new?

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CAROLYN FINNEY



BLACK FACES, WHITE SPACES

Difference at the Crossroads: Improvisation, Radical Writing & Risk-taking as Rigor

Dr. Carolyn Finney
University of California, Berkeley

Colloquium

Department of Geography

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to the Great Outdoors