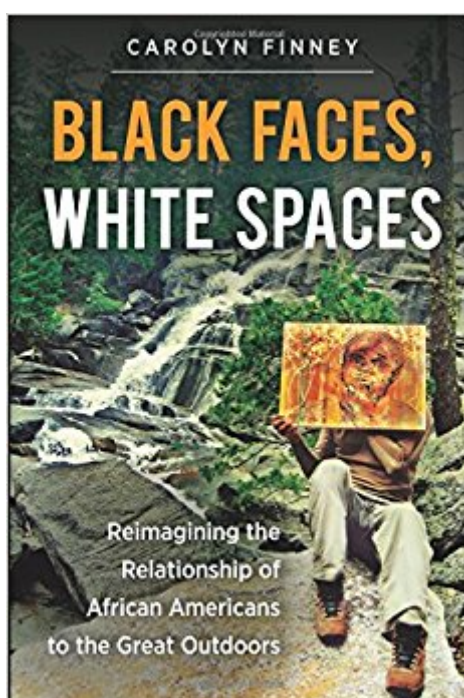


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# Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining The Relationship Of African Americans To The Great Outdoors



## Synopsis

Why are African Americans so underrepresented when it comes to interest in nature, outdoor recreation, and environmentalism? In this thought-provoking study, Carolyn Finney looks beyond the discourse of the environmental justice movement to examine how the natural environment has been understood, commodified, and represented by both white and black Americans. Bridging the fields of environmental history, cultural studies, critical race studies, and geography, Finney argues that the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, and racial violence have shaped cultural understandings of the "great outdoors" and determined who should and can have access to natural spaces. Drawing on a variety of sources from film, literature, and popular culture, and analyzing different historical moments, including the establishment of the Wilderness Act in 1964 and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Finney reveals the perceived and real ways in which nature and the environment are racialized in America. Looking toward the future, she also highlights the work of African Americans who are opening doors to greater participation in environmental and conservation concerns.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Makes a clear case for the dominant culture's habitual (though, sometimes unwitting) rejection of African Americans.--Library Journal Starred Review  
A must-read for those who hope to make the parks matter to diverse populations.--Sierra  
Weaving scholarly analysis with interviews of leading black environmentalists and ordinary Americans, Finney traces the environmental legacy of slavery and Jim Crow segregation, which mapped the wilderness as a terrain of extreme terror and struggle

for generations of blacks as well as a place of refuge.--The Boston Globe  
Finney's exemplary work moves beyond a critique of the movement and popular culture. It carves through multiple layers of meaning to excavate unique moments of African American environmental history that demand retelling.--Choice  
Offers an engaging interdisciplinary analysis of the historical conditions that shape the whiteness of 'Nature' in the United States.--American Book Review

Using collective memory, race, and environment, Finney looks at the effect of slavery and Jim Crow segregation and their key roles in shaping African American connections to place--the 'great outdoors' or the 'environment' more generally. She looks at representation of African Americans in the great outdoors as being a key site of contestation, of struggle. She also looks at the difficulties inherent in discussions of race and diversity within environmentalism, and with environmentalists. Finney shines a different light, and brings a different voice to bear.--Julian Agyeman, Tufts University  
A wonderfully written and deeply insightful book that convincingly explodes the one-size-fits-all narrative of how nature in the United States is both often imagined to be racialized and is, in fact, racialized. Given the white privileging of geography, the sorts of intellectual-cultural insights offered here could very well be transformative. This book will stand alone in the field of geographic treatments of race and nature.--Nik Heynen, University of Georgia

Carolyn Finney's work functions at the axis of critical race theory and environment studies, examining the relationship between black Americans and the natural environment, and how this relationship has been shaped and codified by racism, violence, class difference, and white privilege. This book raises some very important questions on how our culture views that relationship and also addresses the fears black Americans associate with the environment and the advances that black Americans have contributed to environmental causes. The book focuses on a number of different topics to demonstrate the problematic and tenuous bond between race and environment: slave labor, the association between wilderness and lynching, lack of diversity in visitors to and employees of national parks, racist depictions of black people related to tropes of "wildness," and the racial underpinnings of government and media reactions to Hurricane Katrina. All the arguments this text makes are valid and, even more, crucial. However, the book seems slightly unfocused and spread too thin. In an effort to paint a comprehensive picture and tackle all possible avenues related to this mostly unexplored intersection the book lacks an argumentative and theoretical depth. Hopefully, this is only the beginning and Finney continues to contribute more scholarship regarding these issues, as it is badly needed.



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