"Keep going" : African Americans on the road in the era of Jim Crow

Gretchen Sullivan Sorin

University at Albany, State University of New York, sorings@oneonta.edu

The University at Albany community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd

Part of the Other History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation

https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd/115

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Legacy Theses & Dissertations (2009 - 2024) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive. Please see Terms of Use. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.
“Keep Going:” African Americans on the Road in the Era of Jim Crow

by

Gretchen Sullivan Sorin

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts & Sciences
Department of History
2009
“Keep Going:” African Americans on the Road in the Era of Jim Crow

by

Gretchen Sullivan Sorin

COPYRIGHT 2009
Abstract

“Keep Going”: African Americans on the Road in the Era of Jim Crow

Gretchen Sullivan Sorin

Americans loved their automobiles. African Americans in particular embraced their automobiles because every aspect of travel in the era of Jim Crow was circumscribed by race and cars allowed them to avoid the segregation of the Jim Crow railroad car and bus. Buying a car also meant participating in consumer capitalism, the essence of American culture. African Americans expressed middle class American values through car ownership and cars helped to alter the way that people behaved toward one and to change deeply entrenched racial etiquette. Along the highways there was a close relationship between race and the organization of space. As black families and business travelers went out on the road, from the 1930s to the 1960s, they discovered a landscape of public establishments where they were unwelcome or even treated with hostility.

To help navigate the hostile roadside environment a variety of guidebooks assisted African Americans as they traveled in a country still in the throes of segregation. These travel guides provided state-by-state listings of public accommodations—hotels and motels, tourist houses, colored YMCAs, restaurants, movie theaters, doctors, barbershops and beauty parlors and various places of entertainment—that welcomed black patronage. The longest lasting and most successful of the African American travel guides was the Negro Motorist’s Green Book, published by Victor and Alma Green in their offices in Harlem. The Green Book appealed to middle class African Americans with its polite and restrained language. Ironically, middle class black travelers believed that travel would promote integration and defeat prejudice, but they were forced to stay in segregated accommodations when they traveled. The Green Book sustained itself for thirty years (1936-1966) by appealing to black middle class travelers and to white liberal supporters. The Standard Oil Corporation sponsored the Green Book and circulated it to their Esso gas station patrons. Travel for African Americans represented a middle class response to discrimination and a way of gaining the rights of citizenship.

Attached is a supplemental file containing a United States map showing the distribution of African American tourist accommodations.
For
My mother, Alvenia Wooten Sullivan (1919-2009)
and
My father Clyde Eugene Sullivan (1911-1983)

Strivers, Nurturers, Storytellers
Contents

List of Illustrations vi

Acknowledgements ix

Introduction 1

One
Middle Class African Americans and the Automobile 13

Two
“4 out of 5 Negro Families Now Own Car” 43

Three
Navigating in a Hostile Environment 81

Four
Travel Books For Everyone? 129

Five
The Negro Motorist Green Book 168

Six
The Language of the Green Book 210

Conclusion
Where Will You Stay Tonight? 242

Appendices 250

Bibliography 268
Illustrations

Figure 1  Nobody Knows de Trouble I’ve Seen
Figure 1:1  Vernell Allen in 1946
Figure 1:2  Marjorie Doneghy and Virginia Brooks beside 1957 Chevrolet
Figure 1:3  Florida A&M student Ruby Powell boycotts segregated busses
Figure 1:4  Family migrates from Florida to Cranberry New Jersey, 1940
Figure 1:5  Harlem couple emerging from their 1930s Cadillac
Figure 1:6  Lewis Hanley with his 1932 Chevrolet Coupe
Figure 1:7  Film still, Operation SCAT
Figure 2:1  Image from 1945 Philadelphia market survey
Figure 2:2  Maryland Chevrolet dealership
Figure 2:3  Musicians in the back of an automobile, c. 1938
Figure 2:4  “All Coons Look Alike to Me”
Figure 3:1  Gary and Gretchen Sullivan behind the family Ford station wagon c. 1957
Figure 3:2  Dixie Highway sign
Figure 3:3  Greenville, Texas downtown banner
Figure 3:4  Jim Crow bathing prohibited sign
Figure 3:5  “We cater to white Trade only” sign
Figure 3:6  Sundown town linoleum print, c. 1935
Figure 3:7  The local KKK visits the fair in Cañon City, Colorado.
Figure 3:8  Billy Middlebrooks trys to talk to a mob
Figure 3:9  Klan “welcome” sign
Figure 3:10 Vernell Allen in Atlantic City, c. 1940s
Figure 3:11 “At the Time of the Louisville Flood,” 1937
Figure 3:12 Menu, Coon Chicken Inn
Figure 3:13 Postcard, Plantation Inn
Figure 3:14 Menu, Topsy’s
Figure 3:15 Postcard, Black Child
Figure 3:16 Postcard, Lynching
Figure 3:17 Vacation souvenirs
Figure 4:1 Standard Oil Roadmap of New Jersey, 1929
Figure 4:2 Arkansas and Nebraska Road Map covers
Figure 4:3 Cover, Negro Motorist Green Book, 1940
Figure 5:1 Ladies enjoying lunch at Rock Rest
Figure 5:2 Victor H. Green
Figure 5:3 Alma Green
Figure 5:4 The Green Book’s all-female staff
Figure 5:5 “A Hint to the Hebrews”
Figure 5:6 Advertisements from the *Negro Motorist Green Book*
Figure 5:7 Letter from Victor Green to Miss Sing, c. 1960
Figure 5:8 Advertisement for Ware’s Market
Figure 5:9 Spectators after the bombing of A.G. Gaston’s Motel, 1963
Figure 6:1 Shakey’s Esso service station
Figure 6:2 Cover, Aunt Julia’s Cook Book
Figure 6:3 Inside front cover, Aunt Julia’s Cook Book
Figure 6:4  Cover, *Negro Motorist Green Book*, 1948
Figure 6:5  Cover, *The Negro Travelers Green Book*, 1953
Figure 6:6  Advertisement for African decorative objects
Figure 7:1  Rock Rest Guesthouse before renovation
Figure 7:2  Rock Rest sign
Figure 7:3  Exterior, Rock Rest
Figure 7:4  Kitchen at Rock Rest

**Tables**

Table 2:1  Median Income by Race for Selected Cities, 1949
Table 2:2  African American Car Ownership by Make of Automobile
Table 2:3  Factory Prices of Cars by Make of Automobile, 1950
Table 7:1  Rock Rest Accounts, 1957-1976
Acknowledgements

This project started smoldering many years ago when my friend and colleague historian Myra Young Armstead introduced me to a small pamphlet that she had discovered while researching the history of summers in Saratoga Springs, New York and Newport, Rhode Island. It was called the Negro Motorist Green Book and all I knew about it then was that it was published during the 1950s and 1960s, when I was a child. It was popular in the African American community, and I had never heard of it. I was intrigued. I couldn’t find a copy so I asked my friend, David Lewis to make a copy at the University of Chicago. I am indebted to David for bringing me my first Green Books.

That little book stayed with me, and when it came time to write my dissertation I mentioned it to my advisor, Ann Fairfax Withington, as one possible topic, among other ideas. Ann, a brilliant historian and wonderful writer, as enthusiastic about the idea as I, (she was perhaps more enthusiastic, since I saw the dearth of information as a daunting obstacle), proposed that I take on the subject for my last research seminar to see whether or not it was a viable topic. Throughout this process Ann, in addition to being the chair of my dissertation committee, has been a mentor, colleague, and friend. She is also an extraordinary and inspiring professor. I have never seen anyone work as hard or as successfully at creating historians who are also great writers. Although she will never be satisfied with my use of the comma, I am a better writer, a better scholar, and a better teacher because of her guidance. I am also indebted to the members of my committee, Dan White and Ivan Steen, marvelous teachers, whose contributions to my doctoral studies were particularly significant. And my thanks to Jerry Zahavi whose sharp and thoughtful critique of my ideas made this a better paper.
I am extremely grateful to The Ephemera Society of America for supporting my research with the 2009 Phillip Jones Fellowship for the Study of Ephemera.

Several of my colleagues at the State University College at Oneonta offered suggestions, helpful review, and research recommendations along the way. Richard Aloysius Lee, my colleague and friend in the English department patiently taught me about semiotics and hermeneutics, information that proved useful in thinking about the language of the Green Book. A bevy of librarians did yeoman’s work in helping me to track down obscure sources including Kay Benjamin, Sally Goodwin, Pam Flinton, Mary Lynn Benson, and Terrisa Rowe. Special thanks to Michael Merilan, my dean, friend, and great supporter and to the provost, Daniel Larkin, an historian who brought a special kind of support to the writing process by spending considerable time pouring over my photographs and helping me to identify car makes, models, and details about specific automobiles. William Walker, my colleague at CGP gave the manuscript a thoughtful reading and offered useful suggestions that helped to shape the final draft. I look forward to his important contributions to our profession.

Joanne Van Vranken at the New York State Historical Association Library tirelessly located numerous obscure articles and books and gently persuaded libraries to extend already extended inter-library loans. Wayne Wright, Associate Director of the New York State Historical Association Library offered boundless enthusiasm and talked with me endlessly about my topic and how to locate specific sources.

Ken Chaison, a superb researcher saved me a trip back to Washington, D.C.
Thank you to my graduate students, Sylvea Hollis, Katherine Chaison, and Alan Rowe, and my graduate assistant, Laura Ayers, whose excellent and detail oriented work helped to organize my photographs and permissions.

My friends and colleagues Rosemary Craig and Catherine Raddatz exhibited endless enthusiasm for my topic and support that never waned. Thanks to Anne Stewart for her help sizing and scanning images. I also owe my gratitude to Christopher Sterba, University of California, San Francisco; Renee Jaussaud, National Park Service; Charles Granquist, The Rockefeller Foundation, Pocantico Hills; John Armstrong, Wright State University Special Collections and Archives; Valerie Cunningham and Richard Candee, who introduced me to Hazel and Clayton Sinclair’s tourist home, Rock Rest; Debra Gust, Curt Teich Archive; Peggy Pearlstein, Library of Congress; Cynthia Falk, Cooperstown Graduate Program.

My Informants graciously shared their stories and memories: Vernell Allen, Dorothy Arumburo, Patricia Barker, Lonnie Bunch, Avery Clayton, Willie Cooper, Spencer Crew, Kevan Cullins, Valerie Cunningham, “Mudcat” Grant, Ramona Green, Bill Gwaltney, Sylvester Hollis, Ken Jackson, Doris and Morris Johnson, Henry Johnson.

My good friend Jonathan Collett, who has shared many a chicken dinner with my family, offered wonderful editing suggestions that contributed substantially to the final product. And to my student friends, Robin Campbell and Carla Lesh, a special thank you for your support and suggestions.
In the African American community beauty parlors and barbershops are essential community resources for information as well as hair care. I feel very fortunate to know Vernell Allen, a superb hairdresser and owner of Vernell’s House of Styles in Albany, New York. Vernell fortuitously introduced me to the Green family. She also shared wonderful stories and photographs with me and permitted me to conduct many interviews in her beauty parlor. I am very grateful for her friendship and her participation in this project.

Special thanks to my husband, Martin, the most honorable human being I know, for his support, good humor, thoughtful ideas along the way, and thorough reading of the final draft. It helps to have a personal “data man” in the family and someone to remind you of the most important things in life. And thanks to my daughter and to my son—both children when I began the Ph.D. process and now grown into kind and responsible adults. Meredith, a geographer made my map, and Gregory, now a college student, for many years generously shared his mother.
“Keep Going:” African Americans on the Road in the Era of Jim Crow

“If you want a taste of freedom, keep going”

Harriet Tubman

“Today, men of all races continue to move and for much the same reasons, though since the days of the foot-traveler and the ox-cart, they travel with much more convenience and comfort and at far greater speed.”

The Negro Motorist Green Book

Introduction

Every summer during the late 1950s and early 1960s Avery Clayton’s parents rented a small house trailer, packed it with food and camping supplies, and drove from their house in Los Angeles to one of the national parks. One year the family traveled to Yosemite, the next year they visited Sequoia National Park, or Kings Canyon. Having grown up in the city, young Avery was amazed by the night sky sparkling with stars. The family trips to see “Old Faithful” and the redwood forest became the memories of a lifetime. For the Claytons these trips served multiple purposes. With disposable income and leisure time the family earned a much-deserved break from urban living—an opportunity, as Avery put it—to “get outside of the city and see that there was another world.” Like many middle class families the Claytons believed strongly that their son should be exposed to the grandeur of the nation and that such experiences supplemented his education. By the 1950s the interstate highway system enabled upwardly mobile families like the Claytons to be travel consumers just as they were consumers of refrigerators, television sets, and coffee percolators; they used their travel dollars to purchase automobiles, campers, hotel rooms, and restaurant meals. The Claytons were just like other comfortable Americans on vacation except that each travel choice they made was circumscribed by race. White Americans driving across the country might

1 Interview with Avery Clayton by Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, August 7, 2008.
experience minor inconveniences—“a parboiled dinner or a lumpy mattress.” But the Negro tourist found that his choices could mean the difference between “eating and not eating, between sleeping in a bed and sleeping in his car.”

With each trip African American travelers faced potential indignities and dangers—taking their children to camp and to college, traveling to church, professional meetings and conventions, vacationing, traveling for business, and working for the cause of civil rights. W.E. B DuBois, the editor of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s magazine, Crisis, traveled all of his life for both business and pleasure. Sometimes he traveled by Jim Crow train car, but he preferred his own automobile. Most African Americans did; they had special relationships with their cars. Unlike the railroad, the automobile provided unprecedented freedom of movement for black Americans and enabled them to travel without being segregated in the “Negro” car of a train. For DuBois, the automobile was a tool that facilitated middle class black life in a white world.

DuBois enjoyed driving his old reconditioned car. In 1932 he drove all the way from New York to the site of a coal miners’ strike in Kentucky. “All over and everywhere the colored people are traveling in their automobiles,” wrote DuBois in his column in Crisis. He seemed quite pleased with the result of car ownership among black Americans and noted that the practice was a particular boon to businessmen like insurance agents, officials of fraternal and religious societies and the like. Perhaps with

---

tongue-in-cheek, he commented on the positive way that the automobile changed transportation for one member of the black elite, a prominent clergyman:

I remember once that the venerable Bishop Turner stricken with paralysis, could for neither love nor money, hire a Pullman berth from Savannah to Atlanta. They fixed the old man up in the ‘Jim Crow’ smoker across two seats. Yesterday I saw the A.M.E. Bishop of Florida. He was gliding along in his Cadillac car with a chauffeur on the way from Jacksonville to Atlanta. He looked extremely comfortable.⁴

The conservative black leader Booker T. Washington also viewed the automobile as essential to black life, but for different reasons. “The most modern vehicle for transportation is the automobile,” he proclaimed. For Washington the automobile was a method for attaining economic self-reliance. With car ownership came the ability to leave the South, to get a job as a chauffeur, or perhaps to start a business. “It is doing almost as much for the Negro as the mule has done,” Washington believed.⁵ While Washington saw the automobile as a passive self-help, tool other members of the black middle class⁶ viewed their cars as weapons in their arsenal to push the cause of civil

---

⁶For the purposes of this study the black middle class included the professional class—doctors, teachers, clergy, lawyers, artists, writers, and politicians; successful business people—corporate executives, and business owners. The black middle class encompasses a broader range of occupations than the white middle class—automobile workers, postal workers, barbers, and railroad porters, for example, are a part of the black middle class. Traditionally shut out of entire categories of employment, many members of the black middle class were underemployed. Porters fit into this category. Pullman porters were highly esteemed within the black community. They had steady employment, but received a great deal of respect because they were so well traveled and knowledgeable about the country. In his memoir of growing up in the era of Jim Crow, Clifton Taulbert remembered that “being a porter on a train was a good job in those days. The porter seemed to represent the best in colored.” Other African American workers attended technical schools or found positions as skilled workers. Before, during, and after World War II, for example, the automobile industry employed black workers at rates higher than other industries. Northern motor cities like Detroit, Flint, and Pontiac needed workers to meet
rights by refusing to accept what W.E.B. DuBois called “color discrimination,” in public accommodations. As one article put it, the Negro showed his rejection of Jim Crow transportation and his “resentment” by “owning his own facilities.”

The automobile also enabled black Americans to exert their rights as American consumers. “Negroes have more than half a billion dollars on wheels,” declared a 1955 article in Our World magazine about the increase in African American automobile ownership. “Negroes are big buyers of automobiles, period.”

Automobile purchase for black Americans, particularly when protective covenants and limited mortgage opportunities kept them from buying houses, provided a way to successfully participate in American consumer culture as well as to travel freely.

Middle class African American families straddled two worlds—a white world in which they were not accepted and a black world in which their middle class strivings were often perceived as imitative of whites. DuBois described the difficult circumstances in which twentieth century African Americans lived. “. . . I could not...
live, without taking into careful daily account the reaction of my white environing world. How I traveled and where, what work I did, what income I received, where I ate, where I slept, with whom I talked, where I sought recreation. . . .” all of these things were dependent upon white America, a group from whom DuBois and other black Americans, like the Averys, were largely excluded.\(^\text{10}\) Paradoxically, as black travelers pushed forward into the white world they were forced to segregate themselves in black communities, black resorts, black hotels, and black restaurants.

The automobile made pleasure travel possible for large numbers of black Americans for the first time, but the idea of African Americans as a people on a journey had been a prominent theme deeply embedded in black history and tradition. From the slave trade to the Underground Railroad—from the Great Migration to the March on Washington—travel, whether forced or voluntary—was an important component of African American identity. In the face of overwhelming oppression, stories of escape on the Underground Railroad made the journey to the North a source of pride and heroism, both real and mythic. Enslaved African American people obtained freedom through travel; they took their freedom by running away. The Great Migration made trips between the urban centers of the North and the rural communities of the South an annual pilgrimage home.

Couched in Christian imagery and rhetoric, the Negro spirituals—the voices of slaves working in the fields—evoked travel to heaven and the Promised Land while

referring as much to ways of getting to a better place on earth. Lyrics such as “I’m goin’ home,” “going home to Canaan,” “ain’t but one more river to cross,” “wade in the water,” and “bound to go” reflected a powerful spirituality and a double meaning that meant the trip north to freedom as well as the spiritual trip. The “land of Jordan” the “free country,” and “another river to cross” were metaphors for leaving the place of slavery and oppression.
Figure 1 African American composer and arranger Harry Thacker Burley (1866-1949) documented the lyrics and musical notation of the Negro spirituals including this sheet music for *Nobody Knows de Trouble I’ve Seen*. The lyrics, “If you get there before I do, oh yes, Lord! Tell all-a-my friends I’m coming too” describes the metaphorical journey to heaven, but also the physical journey to the North—the other promised land—and freedom from the oppression of Jim Crow. The journey appears as a theme throughout the Negro spirituals and in the blues. Historic American Sheet Music, "*Nobody Knows de Trouble I’ve Seen*", Music #737, Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library
During the twentieth century, the words of the spirituals symbolized the journey from the land of Jim Crow to “the promised land”—a place of equality. Martin Luther King, Jr. intoned the words of this metaphorical journey—“I’ve been to the promised land”—to evoke his vision of a liberated people. King spoke of the continuing struggle for liberation as reaching the desired destination—“I may not get there with you.” The notion of travel, physical, metaphorical and metaphysical—representing both geographic places of freedom and the spiritual journey to freedom—also appears in the music of both male and female blues musicians. Ma Rainey, the “mother of the blues,” sang songs about gaining independence titled “Walking Blues,” the “Runaway Blues,” and “Traveling Blues:”

I’m dangerous and blue, can’t stay here no more
I’m dangerous and blue, can’t stay here no more
Here comes my train folks, and I’ve got to go.  

Just as the great blues singers sang of taking to the road, millions of ordinary middle class African Americans “hit the road [for vacations] as soon as the warm weather sets in,” commented travel writer Victor Green. “They want to get away from their old surroundings to see—to learn how people live—to meet old and new friends.” Green, the publisher of the Negro Motorist’s Green Book, one of the most successful of the black travel guides during the segregation years, supported and encouraged African Americans to schedule annual vacations. He and other black travel writers believed that road trips provided a path to Negro self-improvement and a way to end prejudice by placing more well-educated, well-mannered, middle class African Americans in contact with white

---

11 Angela Y. Davis, Blues Legacies and Black Feminism (New York: Pantheon Books 1998) 73.
Americans. The automobile became a weapon in the arsenal to defeat prejudice and advance the cause of civil rights.

This monograph explores the African American experience of travel during the era of Jim Crow and the special connection between African Americans and their cars. Throughout the narrative “African American” and “black” are used interchangeably to vary the text. They are not intended to convey different meanings. The words “Negro” and “colored” are also used where they contribute a period interpretation to the text. Chapter One considers the special relationship between black Americans and their automobiles. For the black middle class cars represented personal liberty, freedom of movement, and an escape from the Jim Crow railroad car. By encapsulating black travelers in a fast-moving private vehicle, car travel helped to change the way that blacks and whites related to one another simply by making it more difficult to identify the race of the driver. As African Americans took to the highways the automobile changed racial etiquette that had been in practice for generations. Safety concerns from determining the right-of-way to defining the proper behavior at traffic signals required that traffic laws be based on practices that protected motorists rather than providing arbitrary deference to one race or another. Traffic laws, of necessity, supported equality on the road despite prevailing attitudes that sought to maintain segregation.

Chapter Two explores African American car ownership by considering the criteria used by black motorists to select automobiles for purchase and the makes of cars that they preferred. A variety of consumer studies conducted in cities throughout the country
documents product preferences of the growing Negro consumer market of the 1940s through the 1960s and provide the sources for this discussion. Articles in black popular magazines debated the best cars for African Americans to take on trips and identified black consumer preferences for brands of gasoline. Black travel guides offered descriptions of each year’s latest car models. The experiences of black families, professionals, and entertainers provide examples of the struggles faced by black travelers.

Using the material culture of the road Chapter Three examines the landscape that African American travelers found as they ventured onto the new highways snaking through the nation. Jim Crow attitudes expressed through road and business signs, billboards, postcards, and souvenirs created an environment for black motorists that ranged from unwelcome to frightening and openly hostile. Public accommodations, hotels, restaurants, gas stations, and hospitals, except those created specifically by and for African Americans, proved equally antagonistic.

Prior to the 1960s simply taking a family vacation challenged the existing racial order for a black family. The automobile dramatically changed the American landscape. For black travelers that landscape was an extremely racially charged space. To ensure the best possible travel experiences, African Americans used a variety of specialized guide books addressed specifically to their needs. While the plethora of mainstream travel guides enabled white tourists to identify places to stay and eat most of these places were off-limits to black travelers. Chapter Four considers how these specialized guides reflected African American needs, and middle class values.
Chapter Five is a history of the *Negro Motorist's Green Book*, later called the *Negro Traveler’s Green Book*, published from 1936 to 1966. *The Green Book* and a host of other African American travel guides provided an important service to the black traveling public and illustrate the complex system of public accommodations created by African American entrepreneurs and institutions that facilitated African American travel. African American travel guides provided a social map to the services that made black motorists feel more secure on the road. While no records exist for the *Green Book* and scholars have been able to unearth little information about this small booklet, a close examination of the entire run of the guide reveals Green as a middle class entrepreneur passionate about travel and anxious to encourage other African Americans to see the country as a way of ending prejudice. “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness,” Green notes on the cover of his *Green Book*, quoting Mark Twain.\(^\text{13}\)

The *Green Book* was written in a carefully coded manner that appealed to its multiple audiences. Chapter Six considers these audiences and the specific language of the guide. Like other pieces of African American writing, the book’s rhetoric is deliberately mild, and reticent, meaning one thing to white observers and quite another thing to its black readership. This chapter explores this paradox of middle class black life. Green’s business was successful only because of its support from Standard Oil and the United States Tourist Bureau. Maintaining cordial and non-threatening relationships with whites yet appealing to his black audience were necessary approaches to ensure the continuation of the *Negro Motorist Green Book*.

\(^{13}\) Victor Green used the quotation, “travel is fatal to prejudice” on the cover of the 1949 edition of *The Negro Motorist’s Green Book*. 

As enslaved Africans found many ways to resist slavery that were both overt and subtle, so too did middle class African Americans a century later find a variety of approaches to address the discrimination they encountered in a nation still in the throes of segregation. With their automobiles black travelers used methods of avoidance—staying away from potential dangers on the road—and resistance—confronting hotelkeepers, restaurant owners, and gas station attendants. African American travelers bravely entered the white world and subtly challenged discrimination. Their methods suited their middle class sensibilities—well mannered, reserved, and polite.

Dr. Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., the first African American CEO of a major American corporation (TIAA-CREF) and frequent business traveler, liked to quote photographer and journalist Gordon Parks who used the phrase, “choice of weapons.” “In terms of fighting you always have a choice of weapons,” Wharton told Fortune Magazine in an interview about black corporate executives. Wharton viewed the behavior that he and his colleagues demonstrated in their relationships with other employees, during corporate business trips, and in the boardroom as a middle class approach to resistance. “Some of us chose to do our fighting on the inside.”

Chapter One

Middle Class African Americans and the Automobile

“Car ownership stands to them for a large share of the ‘American dream’”

My parents came north from Fayetteville, North Carolina to Newark, New Jersey in 1947. My father (Clyde Sullivan) was a recently discharged sergeant in the army and my mother (Alvenia Wooten) a newly minted elementary school teacher, the first in her family to graduate from college. She earned a bachelor’s degree from Fayetteville State; the historically black college was the only type of school available to a smart and ambitious young Negro woman in the 1940s. They met on the base at Fort Bragg where my dad trained soldiers to go overseas. My mother and her girlfriends danced and played cards and checkers with the handsome “colored” soldiers on base, to pass the time. After the war my parents married in Fayetteville, and my father went north where a job awaited him as the Newark branch photographer for the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper. The Seaboard Coastline train brought my mother north soon thereafter, and she secured a teaching position in the Newark public schools. By the time she arrived in the city, my father had found an apartment, and a newly purchased used Model T Ford stood in the driveway. Southern migrants to New Jersey found new opportunities opening up for African Americans—jobs, education, and housing could be found in certain neighborhoods. And, for those who had served in the military, the G.I. Bill provided education and mortgage assistance. After settling in and surveying the real estate market, my parents purchased a two family house—391 Badger Avenue in Newark—and rented half of it to another young family.
At night, my father attended the Newark College of Engineering with help from the G.I. Bill. *The Model T came in handy.* That car took my parents to work and my father to college at night. They drove downtown to shop at Bamberger’s on the weekend, to the Acme market for groceries every Friday, and to St. Mary’s Episcopal Church on Sunday mornings. Each summer they drove back home to Fayetteville to visit my mother’s family. My parents, like other middle class African-American couples, were going places, and the car was taking them there. *The automobile held a special meaning for middle class African Americans, liberating them from Jim Crow trains and buses; it provided feelings of security, dignity, and freedom. Owning a car became an act of personal defiance, demonstrating their middle class status and also helping to change the racial etiquette between blacks and whites.*

Between the 1920s and the 1960s automobile ownership changed African American life. The automobile opened up new opportunities, like those my parents discovered, to travel independently. From the beginning of the automobile age, travel for the growing black middle class created a paradox. Overnight trips required this group—generally supporters of integration—to seek lodging in separate, segregated facilities, the antithesis of the integrated world they envisioned for their children. But these segregated vacation spots, the only facilities available to black Americans before the 1960s, provided comfort and welcome as well as places of respite and acceptance. Despite the contradiction of a group engaging in self-segregation while opposing the practice, African Americans did not simply accept their exclusion from public accommodations.
Even as they sought to avoid direct confrontations with racist whites and as they enjoyed vacationing at black owned resorts, the African American middle class challenged restrictions that forced them into these separate accommodations by pushing for mainstream hotels to open their doors to black Americans.

Because of the difficulties they faced on the road, African Americans thought of car ownership as more than a class status symbol, although they did appreciate the status that accompanied owning a car.¹ As African Americans were dying overseas fighting Hitler in the 1940s, African American soldiers at home were being lynched, beaten, and forced to ride in the back of buses. Jim Crow accommodations and racism in housing, employment, and education seemed incongruous with the democratic values claimed by the Allies. The war exposed American hypocrisy that fueled discontent among African Americans. The mantra in newspapers and from politicians condemning Hitler’s racist policies sounded disingenuous to a people whose government treated them as second class.² The rhetoric of the war, as historian Robin Kelley put it, “unintentionally undermined the legitimacy of white supremacy.”³ Charlie McGarland and his wife were

---


not permitted to board the train in Wake Forest, North Carolina on January 2, 1942 despite their purchase of reserved seat tickets. According to a letter McGarland wrote to NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall, the conductor informed the couple that, “no colored passengers rides (sic) this train,” and proceeded to seat several white passengers. The black couple watched the train pull away from the platform wondering, "...what part is the Negro going to play in this war? Why should we fight when we are discriminated [sic] on the train and in other places?”

During World War II a barrage of such letters to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization, described the same indignities to black soldiers, wearing the uniform of the United States Army and on their way to fight on European battlefields, that plagued McGarland and other African Americans. One rail official even used the war as justification for the Jim Crow treatment of passengers. C. H. Gattis, Assistant Traffic Manager of the Seaboard Railway, the rail line running along the eastern coast from New York City to Florida, used the war as a cover-up for his company’s racist practices. Heavy holiday travel and “added large movements of a military nature,” he waffled, necessitated the “difficulties in boarding.” “We are sure you can appreciate the trying conditions under which the railroads and all transportation agencies are working during these war times, and it is not our policy to discriminate against anyone.”

Policy or not, although men like Gattis may have believed such language partially smoothed over the indignity of being left at the station, middle class African Americans were determined to travel.

---

5 Ibid
Although generally available to black passengers, train travel was often segregated during the first half of the century. Less clean and less comfortable accommodations usually accompanied Jim Crow facilities. A 1939 Seaboard Coastline timetable from New York to Miami listed comfortable, “reclining, de luxe seats” in the main coaches, but warned African American passengers that the “Colored Coach [is] not Air-Conditioned.”6 Passengers traveling south might secure a regular seat in Chicago, New York, or Newark, New Jersey only to be moved to the colored car once the train crossed the Mason-Dixon line. Complaints poured into the NAACP about the various forms of bigotry developed to keep black train travelers in their places. Struggling to keep all riders happy, railroad officials mistakenly reasoned that separate cars might spare black passengers the indignity of transferring to the colored car and perhaps avoid dissatisfaction or worse—legal action. In a letter to Thurgood Marshall, C.G. Pennington, the General Passenger Agent of the Pennsylvania Railroad, tried to justify the practice:

Seats in coaches on the through streamlined trains between New York and points south of Washington are all reserved and in order that colored passengers destined to points south of Washington will not be disturbed, a car on such trains is reserved for their use. 7

The NAACP invested significant time and energy responding to complaints from all over the country about unsettling encounters between blacks and whites on public

---

conveyances in the 1940s and 1950s. Middle class African Americans were among the most ardent supporters of this civil rights organization and they wrote letters regularly to protest discriminatory acts and often to propose test cases for possible lawsuits.

By the 1940s, the black middle class had the financial resources to travel for pleasure or for business. Often they had the wherewithal to purchase tickets on more expensive first class Pullman cars—areas of public transportation from which they were most often excluded and areas that were usually reserved for white travelers. Humiliated black passengers wrote articulately on behalf of their race to redress assaults on their dignity, but they received little satisfaction from their letter writing. Responses usually followed complaints, sent from the NAACP counsel to the offending bus, rail, streetcar company or restaurant, but the often-patronizing replies indicate that nothing substantive was done. Hundreds of complaint letters resulted in no court cases and no concessions. “I regret very much that you should have occasion to report difficulties experienced. . .” the letters always began. “It is not our company policy to discriminate” or “the segregation law does present a most difficult problem” were the phrases they used to suggest that the segregation of public conveyances was not the company’s problem. Rather, the bigotry associated with train travel was society’s problem.

Black Americans found small ways to challenge the slights they experienced on trains and other forms of public transportation. They might argue with the train conductor or bus driver, or sit defiantly in a seat at the front of the bus, refusing to move. They helped one another withstand the indignities of Jim Crow America. On a train ride
to Norfolk, Virginia in 1948, a dining car steward quietly protected two black women from a disgusting breakfast. Vernell Allen and her girl friend were on their way from New York to Virginia to visit her friend’s family. Traveling through the night, the two young women were tired and hungry. The separate dining rooms for black and white riders were bothersome, but the women were too hungry to care. After about ten minutes, the black waiter who was serving both the white dining room and the colored dining room appeared to take their order. “I told him I wanted bacon, and eggs, and ham,” Vernell recounted. “You don’t want that,” the waiter replied quietly. “I’ll bring you some orange juice and some coffee. Everything else,” he whispered, “if I serve it to you--it’s food that’s been scraped off the white people’s plates from the other room.” Understanding that the women would be upset by this revelation and that he was sending them back to their seats hungry, the waiter sweetened the message that accompanied his small act of defiance. “To make the day better for you,” he said, “I’m gonna put some vodka in your orange juice.”

---

Figure 1: Vernell Allen in 1946. The recent high school graduate moved to Brooklyn, New York ready to begin beauty school. Anxious to travel she took short trips with friends to places like Norfolk, Virginia and Atlantic City, New Jersey. Vernell found Jim Crow accommodations in both the North and the South. Photograph courtesy, Vernell Allen

All Americans—white and black—enjoyed the freedom and privacy that the automobile represented to go where you wanted, when you wanted and in privacy. “Of course Negroes ride in the Jim Crow coach here,” commented an upper class black man from North Carolina. “But I don’t ride in it; I just don’t ride trains now. I use my car and drive anywhere I want to go. That’s one of the reasons I have a car.”

The newfound freedom and adventure of the road seemed particularly sweet for African Americans, a

---

9 Johnson, Patterns of Negro Segregation, 270.
group for whom the full rights of citizenship were denied. Operating a motorcar was a wonderful, liberating experience. Cars offered new opportunities. “We feel like Vikings,” noted Alfred Edgar Smith, a journalist and Administrative Assistant for the Federal Works Progress Administration.10 “What if our craft is blunt of nose and limited of power and our sea is macadamized; . . .The nomad in the poorest and the mightiest of us, sends us behind the wheel, north, south, east and west, in answer to the call of the road.”11

Assuming the role of “Vikings” and nomads appealed to black travelers because of prohibitions on movement and the restrictions imposed by Jim Crow practices. Drivers relied only on themselves when traveling by car. For Willie Cooper, whose first car, Old Betsy, was a key-lime 1956 Buick, the love of driving—the compulsion to be on the open road—and his refusal to give up his drivers’ license at the age of 75 had nothing to do with materialism. It was about personal freedom and dignity. “He wants to drive,” said his daughter, Detroit News reporter Desiree Cooper, “because he has a right to—and he’s earned it.” The sense of independence and the importance of being able to exercise the right to share the open road provided a palpable sense of self-sufficiency to many African American drivers. Driving was a right of citizenship and a demand of dignity.

10 Alfred Edgar Smith (1903-1986), a graduate of Howard University worked throughout his life for Civil Rights. A native of Arkansas and graduate with a master’s degree in history from Howard University, Smith worked for several federal agencies including the WPA. He served as a member of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Federal Council on African American Affairs, also known as his Black Cabinet. A well-known journalist in the African American community, Smith served as a Bureau Chief and writer for the Chicago Defender and also wrote for the Negro Digest and Ebony Magazine.

Driving that Buick and obtaining a driver’s license gave Willie Cooper his sense of self-respect.  

In addition to freedom of movement, cars represented freedom from fear by limiting some of the face-to-face confrontations between black and white. “The ever-growing national scope of modern business commands; pleasure suggests; and (in downright selfish frankness) [I]t’s mighty good to be the skipper for a change, and pilot our craft whither and when we will,” wrote Alfred Edgar Smith.” Cars moderated the fear of venturing from the safety of a black community into white dominated space. Parents traveling with children could more adequately protect their offspring from the verbal and psychological assaults that accompanied a ride on a public conveyance. The constant slights, name-calling, Jim Crow signs, and discrimination that African Americans experienced daily exacted an emotional toll on the recipients of racist slurs.

Historian Andrew Wiese interviewed a variety of black families about their experiences when attempting to buy houses in the suburbs and documented the psychological anguish they experienced. After being refused the right to purchase a house in Philadelphia, Jim Braithwaite was left angry, listless, and distracted. “What,” he asked, “does it cost me to be a Negro?” Joe Feagin and Karyn McKinney answered that question in The Many Costs of Racism, an examination of how the black middle class responded to the anti-black sentiment they experienced every day. Using focus groups

---

13 Smith, “Through the Windshield,” 142.
and in-depth interviews, the book convincingly details constant stress that caused insomnia, anxiety, and such physical symptoms as high blood pressure.\textsuperscript{15} The uncertainty and abuse of travel for black Americans, particularly on public transportation, caused both psychological and physical damage. The purchase and ownership of the family automobile provided both physical and psychic safety.

Cars enveloped parents and their children in a protective bubble, providing psychic safety that shielded passengers from insults. Historian Spencer Crew reminisced about growing up in the 1950s: “that big old car was like a cocoon,” he remembered. “We didn’t know anything except what we saw out the side windows. We could hardly see over the back of the front seat. Our parents protected us from all the racist stuff along the road.”\textsuperscript{16} Children could grow up aware and proud of their blackness, without the constant assaults. A car could move you from one African American neighborhood—or safe zone—to another enclosed in your own rolling living room. The car created a private, protected space that moved within a segregated public sphere. It was “a racial shield.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} “Negroes Spend Half a Billion Dollars on Cars a Year,” \textit{Our World}, (March, 1955): 16.
Automobile travel was fraught with real dangers as well as with embarrassments. Motorists confronted racist law enforcement officers, racist gas station attendants, racist automobile repairmen, and sometimes-angry racist mobs. Driving a car through unfriendly and potentially dangerous neighborhoods and all-white communities represented a small, yet meaningful personal act of bravery, a statement of refusal to accept the status quo. A family would often take whatever resources they had to purchase a car, new or used. For black Americans a car poked a finger in the eye of those
who wanted to see the separate, unequal public transportation facilities continued. At least, that is how some African American car owners saw themselves. “Because of jimcrow [sic] on public transportation,” commented one writer, “he shows his resentment by owning his own facilities.”18 In his study of African Americans in rural Georgia, ethnologist Arthur Rapier also claimed that black travelers used their automobiles to break away from the “irritations of the unequal transportational [sic] facilities provided by train and bus and plane,” meaning that by driving themselves they could avoid supporting a racist system.19 The experience of Rapier’s informants mirrored that of black people throughout the country. They could deprive the racist transportation system of money. Perhaps the ultimate use of the automobile as a weapon against Jim Crow and as an act of rebellion was the 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott and other protests that used similar tactics. For almost a year Montgomery, Alabama’s black residents refused to take the city’s segregated buses. Pulling together, residents walked when they could. For longer distances African American car owners drove protesters to their destinations. These “private taxis” starved the bus system until public officials relented and eliminated separate sections in the back of the buses. The automobile became a useful tool to attack Jim Crow.

18 Ibid
Figure 1:3 Florida A & M student Ruby Powell thumbs a ride as a part of the boycott of segregated busses in Tallahassee, Florida. She is letting black private automobile owners know that she needs a ride. As in the Montgomery Bus Boycott private automobiles played an important role in helping to actively defy Jim Crow laws. Reproduced by Permission of Associated Press

While many black families could not purchase a house, they could buy an automobile. For a people often excluded from the economic benefits of American culture automobiles became visible sources of pride in accomplishment. A fine looking automobile visually demonstrated success and membership in the black middle class. The car became a part of the journey to full participation in American life.
Figure 1: In 1940 this family strapped their possessions to their car (probably a 1935 Buick sedan with no built-in trunk) and migrated from Florida to Cranberry, New Jersey. Cars represented freedom, for the established northern black middle class and also for those African Americans fleeing from the racism and poverty of sharecropping in the south to seek opportunity and independence in northern cities. Courtesy of Library of Congress Collection

The values established by the white middle class were shared, across racial barriers, by the black middle class. Whether black or white, middle class Americans aspired to own the same consumer goods, to send their children to good schools, and to take vacations during their leisure time. Robert Russa Moton, African American educator and successor to Booker T. Washington as President of the Tuskegee Institute and a prolific writer on African American life, described the hopes and desires of middle class black life. “The thinking Negro wants for himself and his children the same things
the white man wants for himself and his children,” he said simply. The black middle class was not interested in imitating white life, but simply wanted to provide a comfortable American life for their families. Moton expressed the views of many African Americans when he identified the material goods and modern conveniences black families hoped to attain to achieve success in the United States:

Books, paintings, sculpture, music, newspapers, magazines, all are common adjuncts of home life. There is the annual vacation for all the family, sometimes by train, sometimes by motorcar. Among them are club life for women as well as for men. Card parties, receptions, at-homes, dances are all a part of the social programme for visiting guests; and where conditions make it possible without humiliation, there are theatre parties also followed by suppers and dances, all of which reflects the genuine Americanism of the Negro. Along with these go literary, scientific, professional, and art societies and clubs whose members have qualified for degrees from recognized American institutions and have distinction in their respective fields. These are the finer flowers of Negro home life.

Middle class values represented no only class status and success, but also full acceptance as a citizen. In Moton’s eyes, the quest for civil rights could be equated with economic equality. Becoming good consumers, he argued, led to the “genuine Americanism of the Negro.” To Moton, full rights resulted from economic success, economic freedom, and membership in the middle class. A marketing report produced four decades later by two Harvard Business School researchers offered findings that confirmed Moton’s assertions. The “Negro Revolution,” the report stated, was not trying to “overthrow the existing order.” Rather it was a push for economic rights and middle class values. The report continued, “as a number of observers have commented, the


21 Ibid, 37.
freedom to move about, in housing, in travel, and in admittance to public and private facilities,” any of the values that represent “well-being and status for white America” also appealed to black Americans.\textsuperscript{22} Throughout the century, cars and leisure travel became ever more important consumer goods that signified freedom of movement, economic freedom, and the full rights of citizenship to which all Americans aspired.

\textbf{Figure 1:5} This elegant fur coat clad Harlem couple in their 1930 Cadillac Series 452 proudly display their middle-class status. The car is particularly showy with its wide white sidewall tires and brightly polished chrome. At the time of the car’s purchase it was worth the enormous sum of about $6,900, considerably more than the median income of black or white families at the time.\textsuperscript{23} Reproduced by permission of the James Vander Zee Estate


\textsuperscript{23} The median income of a black family in New York between 1935 and 1936 was $980. For a white family the median income was $1,930. Gunnar Myrdal and Sissela Bok, \textit{An American Dilemma}, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944) 365.
“The motorcar has woven itself into the fabric of social life: it has become an intimate and necessary part of good living,” claimed C.W. Churchill, a writer for *Harper’s Weekly* in 1916. “The place it fills in our affairs is so conspicuous, and the association of the owner with his car is so noticeable, that public opinion does not fail to classify men and women according to the cars they select for their personal use. The owner is known by his car, whether he wishes to be or not.”

This comment portends the importance the automobile would achieve as a status symbol by mid-century. Riding in an attractive or expensive car enhanced the prestige and self worth of the driver and passengers. African Americans had few opportunities to feel like valuable and valued citizens. A car provided a particularly visible symbol of success in a society that largely excluded black people from the trappings of middle class life. “In every city of any considerable size Negroes are to be found in possession of some of the finest cars made in America—and they are the original purchasers too,” bragged Robert Russa Moton of African American car ownership in 1929.

Photographs from the 1920s to the present preserve proud automobile owners on film posed with their prized possessions. Whether the owners are standing in front of, alighting from, or sitting behind the wheels of their highly polished new Buicks, Chevys, Fords, or Studebakers, cars often play a commanding role in the photographs. African Americans, like their white counterparts, pasted these frozen moments in time into their albums to signify achievement, but also to acknowledge their status and equality. The

---

25 Moton, *What the Negro Thinks*, 42.
people in these photographs could purchase a car that equaled the cars owned by any other American.

Figure 1:6 Lewis Hanley was certainly proud of his ownership of this impressive and well cared for 1932 Chevrolet Coupe. Hanley’s right arm holds the wheel of the car as he might put it comfortably around a special girlfriend. The size and elegance of the car suggest the owner’s middle class identity. c. 1935. Reproduced by permission of the Kentucky Historical Society

Material possessions were and are discernible signs of success and visible recognition of class status. For many African Americans a good quality automobile became their largest and most visible possession. By the 1930s a growing number of black families found that they could afford to purchase property, but prejudice shut them out of the housing market. Many families found that they could purchase only certain houses in black neighborhoods. Realtors and banks redlined entire communities. The practice of redlining involved drawing a red line, either literally or figuratively around
residential blocks for the purpose of illegally limiting those who could or could not live within the drawn borders. Duplicitous banks refused to issue mortgages to qualified black families preventing them from owning houses in certain areas. Federal lenders also viewed African American areas as high risk for mortgages. Attorneys and realtors often placed restrictive racial covenants on housing deeds. Zoning ordinances prevented black families from moving into white neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{26} During the Depression, Federal agencies like the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and other New Deal programs contributed to discrimination by incorporating racial bias into their calculations of financial risk. With restrictive zoning and without loans and insurance African American families were often limited to renting housing rather than buying their own property. Middle class African Americans had discretionary income but fewer options than whites to spend their money. Automobile dealers were generally willing, although not always eager, to sell cars to black customers. Purchasing a car was considerably easier than buying a house.\textsuperscript{27}

Marcus Alexis’ 1959 study of African American automobile ownership and several subsequent studies of black consumerism based on Bureau of Labor Statistics data provide quantitative evidence that black Americans’ ability to purchase expensive


\textsuperscript{27} For information on African Americans home ownership and redlining see Sociologist Amy Hillier’s website about her doctoral and post-doctoral research work on Redlining in Philadelphia. This site provides an excellent overview of the history of this practice in one northeastern city. http://cml.upenn.edu/redlining/intro.html accessed 2 March, 2008; Kristen Crossney and David Bartell’s article, “Residential Security, Risk, and Race: The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation and Mortgage Access in Two Cities” confirms the link between race and restrictions on mortgage awards, but also offers a more complex analysis of the HOLC’s policies and history.
goods like automobiles stemmed from their inability to make other middle class purchases such as houses. While Alexis’ studies indicated no significant differences in leisure spending habits between black and white consumers in comparable economic classes, the black middle class demonstrated a strong willingness to scrimp and save so that they could purchase cars and other goods.\textsuperscript{28} The criteria for the selection of a particular make of car varied from driver to driver, but African Americans’ concerns in choosing their automobiles generally differed from the concerns of white buyers. Alexis’ study further determined that black families were more likely than white families to purchase used cars, but preferred to buy larger, more expensive makes than those favored by white car owners.\textsuperscript{29} For African Americans the automobile proved to be more than simply a mode of transportation, but a visible symbol of class identity and a middle class tool to fight oppression. But black buying power, vehicle selection, and even driving practices were sharply focused by discrimination.

The automobile made a notable difference in the lives of African Americans, but the changes brought about in the way that black people and white people behaved in casual encounters were equally significant. Whites generally expected blacks to be deferential and as invisible as possible. During the day blacks might work in menial tasks that served whites, but at night they were expected to return to their own communities and avoid tampering with the accepted social order. The automobile altered

\textsuperscript{28} Black and white consumers spent their leisure dollars in very different ways. While white consumers had access to expensive clubs, sporting events, and restaurants these avenues were closed to the black middle class who spent more disposable income on support of the black church and other social responsibilities. Marcus Alexis, "Patterns of Black Consumption, 1935-1960," \textit{Journal of Black Studies} Vol. 1 No. 1 (1970): 55-74.

\textsuperscript{29} Marcus Alexis, "Racial Differences in Consumption and Automobile Ownership" (University of Minnesota, 1959) 68.
racial etiquette by empowering Negro motorists to be more aggressive. They could ignore demands for deference because white drivers could not always tell who was behind the wheel.\textsuperscript{30}

Cars placed more distance between travelers than open wagons or crowded train cars. As African Americans traveled throughout the country, the rapid and anonymous nature of automobile travel challenged traditional rules of engagement. The new patterns of travel created by individual vehicles moving at high speeds made it more difficult, although not impossible, for white Americans to practice discrimination and force deferential behavior from behind the wheel as they had on the train, the bus, or even walking down the street. The private automobile successfully foiled conventions of racial etiquette that required immediate deference. Bemoaning the loss of the face-to-face contact and proper etiquette possible if two horse drawn vehicles passed one another, the author of an editorial in the \textit{Atlantic Magazine} complained, “I realize that motorists in fast-moving glass-enclosed cars cannot exchange the gracious greetings or the gallant gestures of the horse-and-buggy era.”\textsuperscript{31} But neither could white motorists expect black drivers to pull to the side of the road to let them by or to give them the right-of-way that might be expected with carriages where all occupants were clearly visible. People walking down the same sidewalk could demand that black citizens step into the street or move aside, but those same acts of deference could hardly be required at highway speeds. Furthermore, closed vehicles made it difficult or even impossible to identify the occupants. Maintaining racial etiquette required that one’s identity be known and clearly visible.

\textsuperscript{30} Johnson, \textit{Patterns of Negro Segregation}, 124.
Black motorists were particularly adept at self-preservation on the road. Since law enforcement officers could not always be trusted, black motorists feared being stopped. Driving etiquette for black families meant staying out of the way. A black motorist in Arkansas warned other drivers to look out for white women and to drive defensively:

You have to be pretty careful driving on the streets here in town. They [whites] drive so wild and crazy here that you have to be on your toes. I drive naturally and watch out. The white women drivers are not as careful as they might be, so I keep close watch out for them. You know how far you would get with them in any kind of argument about right and wrong. The best thing I know is to stay on the right side, and as far out of the way as possible.\(^\text{32}\)

In her 1949 book of etiquette, Emily Post referred to the automobile age as the “beginning of an entirely new era of social behavior.” Etiquette mavens sold new editions of their manuals by offering advice on how to negotiate the confusing new manners required on the road. In some southern communities, it breached racial tradition for a black driver to pass a white driver on the road. Whites often assumed that they always had the right of way and could justifiably pull out in front of a black driver at any time. That is, of course, if the driver could be assumed to be a black man or woman. The “Safe Driving Rules” in the *Negro Motorist’s Green Book* subtly warned black drivers to watch for this dangerous behavior, “[w]hen the other car passes you, watch out that he doesn’t cut in on you.”\(^\text{33}\) Expressing his concerns about those who tried to maintain the old racial etiquette from behind the wheel of a car, one black driver commented:

These white women act like they think these brakes is colored too and just naturally stop dead still when they sees a white woman bursting into an open

\(^{32}\) Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation*, 272.

highway without stopping. They look up and sees you colored and keep going like it’s a disgrace to stop at a sign to let a nigger pass.\textsuperscript{34}

While courtesy was important, the danger posed by the speed of the automobile made concerns about safety take precedence over race, gender, or class etiquette, and states enacted standardized traffic rules. Etiquette maven Emily Post reflected these concerns in her well-known Blue Book. She did not mention race, but explained that no distinctions should be made between men and women in motoring manners for the protection of everyone on the road. “While gallantry is expected of all gentlemen, on the highway women drivers lose the ready identity of their sex and simply become ‘another driver.’”\textsuperscript{35}

In a culture structured around racial segregation increased horsepower provided African American drivers with a greater sense of equality, born of the anonymity that came with driving. Horsepower enabled motorists to move rapidly without being stopped or harassed by ordinary citizens. At 45 miles an hour, the automobile did not permit the race of the driver to be discerned until after the car had passed, and perhaps not even then. There are some recorded instances of African Americans being dragged from their cars and beaten by angry mobs, but there are certainly far more cases of black people simply driving past whites without being detected.\textsuperscript{36} Getting behind the wheel became an equalizer.

\textsuperscript{34} Johnson, \textit{Patterns of Negro Segregation}, 125.
\textsuperscript{36} For example, NAACP records at the Library of Congress include reported incidents of African Americans being accosted while in their cars. A photograph of Billy Middlebrooks of Clinton, Tennessee trying to talk a mob out of “hauling a Negro motorist from his car” is included in the collection. Prints and Photographs Division, photograph LC-USZ62-117234.
Emily Post expressed concerns about the way that cars leveled the social playing field. She complained about the ordinary citizen who purchased a new car and “feels that he has automatically become the equal of every owner of a similar car, and the superior of the owners of all cars of less importance.” The car, Post feared, became a tool for instant social climbing and an instrument that enabled the lower classes to feel equal to the middle classes. She lamented that “the man in moderate circumstances will stint himself in every way to buy a car actually beyond his means, thus to gratify his desire to go one better than his neighbor.” Not only did cars make you more equal she continued but they could make you more confident and aggressive. 37

Public attitudes about African Americans behind the wheel were complicated. Many chauffeurs driving for the rich were black men. Black chauffeurs dressed in livery seemed appropriate to whites, but the black owners of private automobiles were often seen as overstepping their “place” in American society. Some Americans even condoned violence to enforce their views and were willing to drag black motorists from their cars to prevent them from driving into white neighborhoods. In the midst of such divergent attitudes government officials often ignored issues related to race. In dealing with government policy concerning plans to evacuate American cities in the event of a nuclear attack, for example, government policies simply ignored such problems. African Americans became invisible. 38

38 In addition to excluding African Americans from plans for civil defense they were also invisible in the plans to demolish black neighborhoods in New York to make way for parks and
In the mid-1950s, Cold War scientists promoted plans to empty the cities and suburbs before an impending nuclear attack. The new massive, modern highway system would provide frightened Americans with a rapid escape route to the safety of the countryside. Expanding American highways became a cornerstone of national defense. In a country that valued individual freedom and personal responsibility, automobiles, like bomb shelters, provided families with the ability to take action and protect themselves rather than relying on the government or on forms of transportation that were outside of the control of individual citizens. Citizens were expected to use their private automobiles to drive to massive underground bomb shelters outside the city. The fate of those without cars was not a part of the plan. Some planners and consultants to the Federal Civil Defense Administration knew that black people would be a problem. “It is awesome to reflect on what would happen,” stated a consultants’ report to the National Security Resources Board, “if colored people and white people were forced into close association in shelters, in homes and even evacuation reception centers.” Nevertheless two large-scale evacuation experiments of American cities illustrate that the United States government turned a blind eye to civil defense for black people.

In 1954 Mobile, Alabama practiced evacuation procedures by emptying 480 blocks of the city in a “drive out.” The plan relied primarily on private automobiles to

clear the city of about 75,000 residents. Those who did not own a car depended on the kindness of strangers in an emergency. The short film *Operation SCAT* documented the experiment and demonstrated an orderly exit in which gas station attendants, presumably because of their knowledge of vehicles, automatically assisted the police with traffic control. Neighborly citizens picked up strangers whom they saw walking along the road and delivered them to safety outside of the blast range. Operation SCAT “proved” that American cities could be successfully evacuated in an emergency. “At the normally congested dock area, great hordes of vehicles slowly move forward stopping only for a moment to offer rides to those on foot,” commented the narrator. The idealized evacuation depicted in the movie never mentioned the sharp racial divisions that existed in the state; the city’s more than 14,000 black residents never appear. In 1954 schools and housing in Mobile remained segregated. Housing in case of nuclear attack or other emergencies would certainly have been separate for blacks and whites although such petty concerns might appear unseemly in the midst of a nuclear holocaust where national unity mattered most.

---

40 According to the 1950 federal census of population the city of Mobile, Alabama had 83,250 white residents, 14,520 black residents, and 31,239 “other non-white” residents. Presumably the drive-out was designed to clear the city of the majority of its white residents.


CBS Public Affairs in cooperation with the Federal Civil Defense Administration produced a similar public service message, the frightening film short, *The Day Called X*. This 1957 motion picture dramatized Portland, Oregon’s 1955 “Greenlight” experiment, a practice mass evacuation of the city. As in the Alabama experiment, the film recorded the orderly emptying of the city “in thirty-four minutes.” Portland, on the west coast, was chosen for the experiment because of its size (“about the same as Hiroshima”) and its people—“friendly and rugged in the tradition of the Oregon Trail.” The residents’ survival of the mock nuclear attack depended completely on private cars and the highway system coupled with “a well thought out plan.”

At the sound of Portland’s air raid sirens, the movie camera panned through the city catching school children, hospital patients, bank customers, workers, early morning church-goers, and ordinary people enjoying breakfast at a local lunch counter as they left their tasks and boarded cars and trucks to quietly abandon their city. “There are no actors in this story, but there are a lot of people,” narrator Glenn Ford reminded viewers, “the people of Portland, Oregon and what happened to them or could happen to them on a day called “X.” Not surprisingly for 1955, the good people of Portland exhibited great uniformity. The film included no African Americans, although more than 7,600 African American residents lived in the city. Asian Americans, too, were absent from the film except for a single Asian school child; Portland’s 1,800 Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino citizens make no appearance in the evacuation simulation.44 The Portland film ended with an empty city, the sound of a siren, and the warning to “take cover.”45

---

Orderly lines of cars roll slowly out of Mobile, Alabama in this grainy movie still. The practice evacuation of the city was filmed in 1954. The drill, described in a ten-minute short film, *Operation SCAT*, was designed to determine the effectiveness of civil defense plans, but did not take into account the attitudes of white residents toward their black neighbors. Certainly white citizens in Alabama were unlikely to pick up black citizens in their haste to escape a nuclear holocaust. Such exercises helped to convince the country that good roads were a national security priority, but clearly indicated the invisibility of the nation’s black citizens. Courtesy, Film, *Operation SCAT*, 1954 accessed at http://conelrad.com/cdfilm_more.php?id=248_0_3_0_M

The cities’ plans consciously overlooked American racial traditions that kept blacks and whites separate, choosing to simply ignore the existence of the black community. The approaches portrayed in the movies did not reflect what would happen

---


in an actual emergency. What would become of those who did not own automobiles? In many cities, right of way on the road was dictated not by the position of the cars entering the intersection, but by the color of the drivers’ skin.\textsuperscript{46} How would this affect the orderly evacuation? In Mobile, Alabama’s experiment neither black citizens nor white citizens with automobiles picked up those without cars. African Americans feared any involvement with the local police, so many did not bother to evacuate during the drill. A host of mistakes in civil defense planning boiled down to one over-arching issue—-even in a national emergency when unity was most needed, Americans remained segregated.\textsuperscript{47} Films like \textit{The Day Called X} and \textit{Operation SCAT} convinced the citizenry and elected representatives not only that nuclear war was survivable but also that racial divisions did not exist and the highway system worked equally well for all citizens. The automobile brought profound changes to American life, but as the nation moved forward into the automobile age social relationships between white Americans and African American remained locked in the past.

\textsuperscript{46} In his study of segregation, Fisk University sociologist Charles Johnson found that many drivers expected black drivers to extend the privilege of right of way to white motorists. Johnson, \textit{Patterns of Negro Segregation}, 125.

Medgar Evers hoped to become a lawyer. In the summer of 1954, with a bachelor’s degree from Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College, he applied for admission to the Law School at the University of Mississippi and was rejected. In the 1950s, “Ole Miss” did not accept black students. Instead, Evers became the first field director for the NAACP in the state. This new job involved driving all over Mississippi on back roads and in some pretty isolated places to gather evidence of arson, to investigate murders, and to examine other crimes committed against black residents of the state that were ignored because of the victims’ race. Evers well knew the dangers of the job. The automobile that he selected for his travels was a large and imposing Oldsmobile with a V-8 engine. The car’s powerful engine, known as a “Rocket 88,” was a practical rather than ostentatious choice. The ‘Olds’ had to be powerful enough to outrun an ambush and avoid being pushed from the road and large enough for Evers to stretch out his long legs for a night’s sleep.¹

While there could always be road mishaps, a good quality car with a powerful engine could help to keep you out of a jam in the event that you had to get away quickly. For African Americans choosing an automobile was about more than style and status.

There were other factors that needed to be considered, even for those who were not driving the back roads of Mississippi.

With the growth of the black middle class came a concurrent increase in the demand by African Americans for consumer goods, including automobiles. As black consumers grew into a formidable market they sought to change attitudes about Negroes as a potential consumer market. Black newspapers in major American cities like Los Angeles, Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. conducted a series of community studies of their readers to assess consumer clout and to determine the products that resonated with Negro customers. By determining product preferences the newspapers hoped to create an advertising frenzy among white producers anxious to attract black purchasers to continue to buy their products or to switch brands.

The newspapers hired market research firms to conduct the surveys, soliciting consumers’ preferences on everything from the preferred household soap to the most frequently visited gas stations. In addition to prompting increased advertising in black newspapers and other Negro publications the reports had another agenda. They sought to introduce the black middle class to the white business community. White Americans knew little and cared little about the lives of their black fellow countrymen. “Their lives are in effect invisible to most Americans, who rarely bother to look behind the Color Curtain at the Negroes’ homes, their places of work or worship, or their spirit,” commented a writer for *Time* Magazine.² The families pictured in the reports owned tidy

http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,935334,00.html accessed August 30, 2008
middle class houses with clean stoops and striped awnings. On the cover of *The New Philadelphia Story, A Survey of America’s Third Largest Negro Market* readers met a smiling, perfectly coifed family. The report introduced “the characteristics of the Philadelphia Negro Market” in 1945. The cover illustration, a visual introduction to the black consumer, showed the young, handsome father dressed in a suit and tie ready for his corporate job or perhaps Sunday church services. His attractive wife held a giggling baby. Two other young girls completed the picture. The family appeared to be middle class—prosperous, traditional, and very fair skinned. In essence, the picture suggested, African American families are just like your family—they share the same values—except that they have slightly darker skin. Other images depicted nuclear families—husbands and wives sitting in perfect living rooms reading newspapers. These drawings, accompanied by graphs and charts, introduced white business owners to the importance placed on reading by black Americans.

---

Figure 2:1 Illustrations in the market surveys funded by the black press depict comfortable, well-dressed nuclear families. Designed to attract mainstream corporations to sell their products to black consumers, the surveys characterized the black middle class as sharing the same values as the white middle class. This illustration from the 1945 Philadelphia consumer survey stressed the importance of education to black consumers and depicts a nuclear black family in a tidy middle class living room.

A Baltimore study produced in 1945 touted the city as “America’s 5th largest Negro Market.” Baltimore, the report argued, had a growing and increasingly affluent Negro population. According to the data included in the report, 77 percent of the working people in the city held positions “graded higher than semi-skilled or unskilled.” And 53 percent lived in “better class homes.” The survey results reflected both wartime deprivation—most people owned cars purchased before the war and new cars were not available during the war years—and post-war anticipation. Many of the respondents answered that they intended to buy a new car once the war was over. 27.3 percent of the respondents in Washington D.C. reported that they would buy a new car after the war. In
Baltimore 17.6 planned to buy a car within a year “when they are again being built.”

The report boasted that the average income of Baltimore’s black community matched the average of other major American cities. Baltimore’s large African American market had the potential to purchase a considerable quantity of consumer goods. Photographs provided proof of the report’s claims. The pictures showed well-dressed African American women shopping in local stores for Gold Medal Flour, Free State Beer, Schundler’s Peanut Butter, and Morton Salt and encouraged readers to “Consider the moderate cost of cultivating the well-filled pocket-books of COLORED AMERICA.”

The black middle class had already caught the attention of some manufacturers in the marketplace. Procter & Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive-Peet, Gerber baby food, Johnson and Johnson, and other major producers were purchasing advertising in black newspapers and magazines.5

The overall buying power of the new urban Negro showed tremendous growth. By the 1940s and 1950s all of the studies indicated a significant increase in the number of black Americans who owned cars. One study predicted that 475,000 black families owned at least one car and that half of these cars were purchased new. “This year, Negroes will spend well over $200 million for new cars. And Wait! That’s only in seventeen metropolitan areas with a total of 1,200,000 Negro families. With some four million Negro families in the United States, you can imagine the potential automobile

---


buying power across the nation.”⁶ “Colored America is one-tenth of your national market. In the larger cities the percentages are much higher,” claimed a study for the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper.⁷ Sounding more like hucksters than unbiased market analysts, they identified “a large. . . homogeneous body of consumers” in Washington D.C. and in every major American city “which is characteristically middle class.”⁸ According to these reports, if African Americans in the United States were a country they would have the equivalent per capita income and buying power of the prosperous countries of Western Europe. “This country does exist,” bragged one market survey. “It is the Negro market in the United States.”⁹ These arguments and a variety of others in books, popular African American magazines, and newspapers sought to use a carrot—the buying power of the African American middle class—to entice mainstream manufacturers to open their showrooms and stores to black America. Rather than directly confronting Jim Crow practices, the market approach sought to raise the race by stressing economic gain and individual uplift. Money, the marketers reasoned, was power and could be used to dilute segregation and racism in the United States. The automobile, a very large price-tag purchase, was one of the most important consumer goods to African American buyers.

---

Figure 2.2 - This very well dressed African American woman discusses a fashionable Chevy deluxe sport coupe with an African American salesman in 1949 or 1950. Automobiles were particularly important consumer goods for black Americans. “Travel by automobile has increased amazingly among colored people in the United States,” noted an African American travel guide.10 Courtesy Maryland Historical Society.

Although automobile registration records do not indicate the race of the owner, details about the brands of cars that African Americans purchased are found among the series of surveys funded by the black press. African Americans in Baltimore exhibited a fondness for large, roomy Buicks, the car choice for 18 percent of the black car owners. 14.5 percent owned Dodges; 13.2 per cent, Fords; and 11.9 percent Chevys. According to a similar study conducted in Philadelphia, “America’s Third Largest Market” for African Americans in 1946, the preferred car was a Buick. “Buick is first choice in automobiles,

ranking over Ford, Chevrolet, and Plymouth, significant in that it shows the willingness to make a relatively heavy investment in a product which is a big factor in the opportunity it gives for family utility and recreation,” claimed the report. 36 percent of Philadelphia’s black residents had purchased their cars new, and 64 percent bought them second hand. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, one of the most important and widely circulated African American newspapers in the country, surveyed its constituents in 1950 and came up with similar results. Pittsburgh’s black consumers purchased Buicks more often than other brands of cars.\(^{11}\) The New York-based Interstate United Newspapers organization also found Buicks the car of choice among African American buyers in its nationwide survey.\(^{12}\) Later surveys showed different preferences, but clearly African American buyers preferred larger cars. “[S]ales figures show that compact cars do not have as much appeal to Negroes as they do in the general market,” commented an article in the *Chicago Defender*.\(^{13}\)

The key finding of a study of the differences in automobile buying behavior between black and white Americans was that overall African Americans purchased more expensive, heavier, and more powerful cars regardless of income. The study concluded that automobiles seemed to be more important to African Americans.\(^{14}\)

Many families certainly drove solid Fords or Chevys. When combined, these two brands represent the most common automobiles owned by black drivers. But Buicks and

\(^{11}\) Consumer Analysis of the Pittsburgh Negro Market, p. F-1, 19.4 percent purchased Buicks, 13.7 percent purchased Fords and 9.7 percent purchase Chevrolets.


other luxury cars were proportionately more popular with black drivers than with white drivers of similar income levels. “The Cadillac, Lincoln, Imperial, and Buick became the trademark for success from 125th Street in Harlem to Los Angeles,” claimed an article in Sepia Magazine. Buicks were neither the cheapest cars rolling off of the assembly line nor the most expensive. They were a bit larger, heavier, and more luxurious than the standard model Fords or Chevrolets. Even the Buick advertising tagline, “When better cars are built, Buick will build them,” gave consumers the impression of the vehicles as solid and dependable.

## Median Income by Race for Selected Cities, 1949

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Negro</th>
<th>Other Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>$2,644</td>
<td>$1,901</td>
<td>$2,153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>$2,419</td>
<td>$1,566</td>
<td>$1,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>$2,517</td>
<td>$1,707</td>
<td>$1,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>$2,355</td>
<td>$1,368</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>$2,284</td>
<td>$1,529</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>$2,830</td>
<td>$1,906</td>
<td>$2,348</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2:1 This table shows that in 1949 African Americans (referred to in the 1950 census as Negroes) earned an average of two-thirds of the income earned by white Americans. (For a detailed distribution of earnings by race and their percentages see Appendix B). Despite their lower incomes African Americans tended to prefer larger automobiles for a variety of reasons including safety and protection, reliability, engine power, and size. Black motorists stranded without a black hotel might end up stretching out to sleep in their cars. Data Source: 1950 Census of U.S. Population detail table 87, income by state, city, and race. U.S. Census Bureau, Suitland, MD.
African American Car Ownership by Make of Automobile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Surveyed</th>
<th>Buick</th>
<th>Ford</th>
<th>Chevrolet</th>
<th>Plymouth</th>
<th>Dodge</th>
<th>Olds</th>
<th>Pontiac</th>
<th>Cadillac</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington D.C.</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2:2 This table illustrates African American car ownership in three American cities between 1945 and 1951 based on surveys conducted by a variety of market research firms for the Philadelphia Afro-America, The Pittsburgh Courier, and the Washington Afro-American Newspapers. The Pittsburgh Courier did not include the Dodge in its listing. These data indicate the popularity of the larger, more powerful and more expensive Buick among African American automobile buyers. The data also demonstrate that black drivers purchased Cadillacs in the same proportion that they were purchased by white drivers—a little over 3 per cent. (Note: the abbreviation Olds above is for Oldsmobile).
Factory Prices of Cars by Make of Automobile  
1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Price Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buick</td>
<td>Special Series 40</td>
<td>$1,803-$1,983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Super Series</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Series 50</td>
<td>$2,041-$2,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roadmaster</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Series 70</td>
<td>$2,528-$3,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>Deluxe Six</td>
<td>$1,333-$1,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deluxe V-8</td>
<td>$1,419-$1,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Custom Deluxe V-8</td>
<td>$1,590-$2,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chevrolet</td>
<td>Special Series Six</td>
<td>$1,329-$1,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deluxe Series</td>
<td>$1,482-$1,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>Deluxe Six</td>
<td>$1,371-$1,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Deluxe Six</td>
<td>$1,603-$2,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodge</td>
<td>Wayfarer</td>
<td>$1,611-$1,738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meadowbrook</td>
<td>$1,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coronet</td>
<td>$1,927-$2,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldsmobile</td>
<td>Seventy-Six Series</td>
<td>$1,615-$2,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eighty-eight Series</td>
<td>$1,725-$2,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ninety-eight Series</td>
<td>$2,095-$2,615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontiac</td>
<td>Streamliner Series Six</td>
<td>$1,673-$2,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Streamliner Series Eight</td>
<td>$1,742-$2,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chieftan Six</td>
<td>$1,571-$2,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chieftan Eight</td>
<td>$1,763-$2,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadillac</td>
<td>Series 61</td>
<td>$2,761-$2,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Series 62</td>
<td>$3,150-$3,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Series 75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Fleetwood)</td>
<td>$4,770-$4,959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2:3 According to market surveys conducted between 1945 and 1951, African Americans purchased a wide variety of cars. The surveys found that a majority of African American car owners purchased the larger, heavier, more expensive Buicks. The next two categories, the lower priced Fords and Chevrolets, together totaled slightly more cars purchased than Buicks. Overall, however, black car owners tended to purchase automobiles that were more expensive, that they believed were more reliable, and that would carry food and plenty of supplies.

It seems self-evident that the decision to purchase a Buick—a higher priced car—could increase with a family’s income. African Americans with higher incomes bought more expensive cars. In the District of Columbia, for example, 15 percent of black residents with rents above $50.00 per month drove a Buick, usually perceived of as an upper middle class car. Only 5.3% of workers with rents below $30.00 per month bought Buicks.\textsuperscript{16} But when choosing a family vehicle, income and purchase price were not the only determining factors in car sales. Space, safety, speed, and performance were particularly important to black motorists.

Middle class African Americans traveling by car for annual vacations or for business looked for cars with large roomy trunks. A larger car was necessary to carry all the gear they brought along. Black travelers stowed all sorts of extra supplies that might not be available to them along the road. African American motorists were unsure where to stop along the road and were afraid of the reception they might receive when seeking gasoline, restrooms, and accommodations. Everything that might be needed to eat, to sleep, and to repair the car would be brought along to avoid as much unpleasant social contact as possible and to provide for emergencies. The car became an extension of the safe home environment and the safe black neighborhood—a home on wheels—stocked with pillows and blankets, water and tools, maps, and ice chests of food.

Each year, early during the summer travel season African American magazines and newspapers offered travel guidelines to inform black motorists how to protect themselves when traveling by car. The *Pittsburgh Courier* urged drivers to identify and learn the varied driving regulations for the states they would pass through and to heed all speed and road signs to avoid being stopped by the local police. Journalist John Williams’ travel diary offered what he called last minute driving instructions for black motorists. He suggested stopping for gas only in large cities, and he encouraged black motorists to watch out for speed zones and speed traps. Some of the towns that the journalist drove through did not post speed limits until it was too late. “You’ve had it,” he declared, if a law enforcement officer stopped your car:

They’ll pull you back into town to appear before the judge, but the judge won’t be there. They’ll tell you that you have to post a bond of fifty, seventy-five, or a hundred dollars, in order to be free to go on your way. If you post the bond, they’ll tell you when to come back and appear before the judge. You never come back; who in hell wants to come back to Georgia? And they know that all you want to do is get away. Watch your step, keep your tongue inside your head, and remember where you are.\(^\text{17}\)

Baseball player James “Mudcat” Grant recommended always staying below the speed limit. “There were a ton of rules in those days. If you were black driving, you had to definitely go by, you couldn’t go two miles over the speed limit ‘cause that gave a white police officer a chance to give you a ticket.”\(^\text{18}\) *The Amsterdam News* suggested planning each trip in advance, doing a complete safety check on the car, and avoiding

\(^{17}\) John A. Williams, *This is My Country Too* (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1964) 55.

driving while fatigued. While sound advice for any drivers, these tips took on special meaning for black motorists in Jim Crow America. In addition to following these tips black motorists believed in gassing up at home the night before a trip, stocking the car liberally with food to make it possible to drive straight through to a destination, and sticking, where possible, to the boring, but safer inter-state highways. Baskets overflowing with sandwiches, jugs of water and iced tea, an old coffee can to serve as a makeshift toilet, and supplies for emergency repairs needed to fit inside.

Many African Americans remember the necessary precautions for making a road trip in segregated America. Historian Karen Fields’ parents transformed the family car into a “self contained capsule,” holding food, water to fix a potential radiator leak, and lots of maps to guide the way through the countryside and avoid the necessity of asking for directions. Valerie Cunningham recalled that when she was a girl her nervous father brought a potty on trips, “in case I had to go to the bathroom, and toilet paper, and food.” Even for short trips, “and we’re talking about a one hour trip to Boston,” the family patriarch wanted to avoid having to stop and ask to use the rest room at a service station. Jerry Hutchinson remembered that his family always packed a coffee can to use as a “pee can” without even thinking about it. It was second nature. “My parents never addressed why we had to carry it. They didn't need to, because even as a child I already knew the answer to the unasked question. Ole Jim Crow didn't allow for us to use the

---

restroom whenever we stopped for gas. That stop for fuel would be the only stop made. It just wasn't thought safe to do otherwise.”

The Grants, the Fields, the Cunninghams and the Hutchinsons avoided embarrassment by limiting encounters with strangers, and to do this each family needed a big car. They brought parts of their homes with them when they traveled to make up for their inability to find motels and bathrooms along the way. Limiting encounters meant bringing everything you could possibly need along for the ride. Baseball player “Mudcat” Grant remembered his family bringing along plenty to eat in the car when the family traveled to avoid the shame of going around to the back door of a restaurant or the humiliation of having the food shoved through the “colored” food slot. Concerned about the quality of the meals sold to black tourists by white owned establishments, the Grants prepared their own meals to take along. “We carried ice in the car, we carried sandwiches in the car. We carried drinks in the car. . . Some good old homemade lemonade was better than anything you could buy anyway.”

Black drivers, afraid of getting stuck, selected cars they believed to be consistently dependable. An inferior car could strand you in a frightening town. Ten-year-old Lonnie Bunch and his father, a dentist, got a flat tire in a Virginia town about 1962. Within just a few minutes several cars of police officers arrived and proceeded to harass Dr. Bunch for stopping his car in the wrong part of town—the affluent white

neighborhood. Lonnie’s father instructed him to stay quiet as the officers pushed the two to get out of the area quickly and get over to the black hotel. “I’ve never been so frightened in all my life,” Lonnie remembered.

Purchasing a larger car also made long hours behind the wheel less stressful and easier for extended trips “I wanted a heavier car—a more comfortable car, because I was on the road constantly,” said New York engineer Henry Johnson of his robin’s egg blue Buick.24 Some black motorists restricted their exposure to whites by sleeping in their cars rather than risking a stop at an unfriendly motel. “I think the enthusiasm for larger cars in the black community,” noted Bill Gwaltney of his experiences traveling with his parents and his brother in the 1950s, “relates to the need to have a good place to sleep should you encounter trouble along the road or be unable to find the colored hotel.”25 A large comfortable car made a comfortable bed when necessary. Sometimes there was simply no black hotel for miles and no place to sleep except in the car. Many performers and others who traveled regularly drove all through the night rather than risk sleeping by the roadside, which could be dangerous, or taking the time to search for a place to stay. Black performers easily found venues to perform throughout the country, but often no hotel nearby that would permit them to spend the night.

Figure 2:3 Musicians traveled frequently by automobile often late at night because they could not find lodgings in the community in which they were performing. In this photograph two musicians ride in the rear of a large, nicely upholstered sedan, possibly a Buick Limited or a Cadillac Series 75. Such large vehicles carried all of the gear that musical groups and other travelers needed, but also enabled the occupants to sleep in the car if necessary. Musicians Playing Accordion and Washboard near New Iberia, Louisiana, c. 1938, Russell Lee, Farm Security Administration Photographer, Courtesy, Library of Congress.

In 1937 Marian Anderson agreed to give a performance in Princeton, New Jersey, but when the concert was over, none of the hotels in the city would accept reservations from a Negro. Albert Einstein offered her his guestroom, and the two became lifelong friends. Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson rarely tried to find a room, preferring instead to use her car as a rolling hotel and to travel to her next gig late each night. In her autobiography, she described her exhausting singing schedule, the frenetic nature of

travel, and the difficulty of finding food and lodging while on the road. “To turn off the main highway and find a place to eat and sleep in a colored neighborhood meant losing so much time that we finally were driving hundreds of extra miles each day to get to the next city in which I was to sing,” she wrote. “It got so we were living on bags of fresh fruit during the day and driving half the night and I was so exhausted by the time I was supposed to sing I was almost dizzy.”

If you could afford it, a big car made sense for the black traveling public. It offered comfort and protection, a place to sleep and eat, a high performance engine for maximum speed, and room to carry all of the requisite equipment for the road. In white mythology black Americans bought large cars to show off and to imitate white behavior, but for black travelers, safety, security, and performance trumped status where a car was concerned.

While African American consumers had very practical reasons for buying larger cars, many white Americans viewed a black man with a big expensive car as a source of irritation and even a challenge to the accepted racial order. Negroes driving fancy cars (except as chauffeurs) usurped white privilege. Like the affluent members of the Middletown community who condemned the poor and immigrants for owning cars, many whites, especially those who could afford only modest automobiles, saw Negroes with larger cars as engaging in behaviors above their subordinate status in society. Charles S. Johnson’s study of segregation practices documented instances of white drivers in cheap cars intentionally damaging better quality vehicles driven by black drivers just to be malicious and to protect the social order. I can’t purchase a Cadillac, so why should a

Negro be able to buy one, they reasoned? Negative popular attitudes about African Americans driving Cadillacs are reminiscent of the myth of big-lipped coons dressed in fancy clothes that suggested that blacks were pretentious, flamboyant, and trying to adopt the behaviors of whites.

Figure 2:4 Images like this turn-of-the-twentieth century sheet music portrayed African Americans as pretentious imitators of white behavior. The stereotyped characters seen here demonstrate their ineptitude as members of the middle class through their over-the-top evening attire that features extreme patterns, exaggerated leg-o-mutton sleeves, and pretentious accessories like walking sticks and pince nez. In the automobile age African Americans purchasing fine cars were considered by many whites as similarly pretentious, unless the black driver happened to be the chauffeur. Courtesy, Brown University
The “coons” in their dress attire appeared as child-like imitators of white manners and pastimes, unworthy of the status such possessions afforded to white people of the upper class. The argument was moral as well as economic. Why should people perceived as child-like, lower class, and inferior—who worked primarily in service to whites—own expensive cars? Luxury cars for black people contradicted notions of white supremacy. Mahalia Jackson could easily afford the Cadillac she purchased, but unlike white performers, who engaged in far more extravagant purchases, Jackson found it constantly necessary to explain her choice of such an expensive car. At least four times in her autobiography she defended her selection of a Cadillac, explaining that her extensive travel schedule, the need for comfort while constantly on the road, and the one-night performances in towns far from airfields and train stations made a high quality car a necessity:

The one-night-stand concert artist has to be stronger than a Mississippi mule. You finish singing about eleven o'clock at night. You're too keyed up by the evening to go to bed but you're in a strange town and by that time even chatting with the nicest visitors is a strain. . . Most of the time you can't make a good train or plane connection that will carry you anywhere near where they have booked you to sing the next night. The best thing to do is to get in a good car and go. It has to be a big, fast-driving easy-riding car so that you can get your rest. Sometimes we leave town right after a concert and sometimes we sleep and get out after an early breakfast, but we spend most of the time between concerts on the road.

Jackson and other black performers, unlike similarly well-paid white performers, felt pushed to justify their consumer purchases.

While African Americans preferred larger cars the limited number of black Cadillac owners suggests an interest in practical concerns rather than status. But both
blacks and whites believed the popular folklore that more Negroes than whites owned Cadillacs. “Check that cat. He’s pushing a Caddy and his old lady’s pushing a broom,” went a popular self-deprecating view of blacks who owned fancy cars. Several publications tackled the idea that luxury cars predominated in black neighborhoods. “Negroes are driven to spend their earnings in showy ways because they still cannot get the more ordinary things a white man with a similar income would buy,” an African American businessman told Time magazine. An article in Ebony Magazine pointed out that many black people lacked access to housing, leisure pursuits, and many of the other good things in American life on which one might spend discretionary income. “Long ago they found out that they could not live in the best neighborhoods or hotels, eat in the best restaurants, go to the best resorts because of racial discrimination.”

Our World conducted an extensive study within seventeen cities in the U.S. with large black neighborhoods and discovered that “the chances are ten to one that if you went out to buy yourself a new car, your choice would not be a Cadillac at all, but a Buick or a Chevrolet: maybe a Ford or Mercury. This is the brand preference, one, two, three of the Negro market.” So prevalent was the mistaken impression that Negroes all drove Cadillacs that even some African American publications believed the stereotype to be true, and offered justifications for extensive Cadillac ownership. “Just as to white Americans the Cadillac is a sign of wealth and standing,” noted editor John H. Johnson in Ebony Magazine, “so to Negro Americans the Cadillac is an indication of ability to compete successfully with whites, to maintain the very highest standard of living in this

Johnson believed that Cadillac ownership was a tool to further economic equality. “The fact is, that basically a Cadillac is an instrument of aggression, a solid and substantial symbol for many a Negro that he is as good as any white man.” The Negro Digest also believed the stereotype that African Americans preferred to buy Cadillacs and the publication both justified and condemned the practice in an article on the black vacation market. “With other avenues of expenditure closed to them, Negroes have been inclined to put their extra cash into big cars and expensive clothes,” the author commented derisively. “Says one Harlem Negro, fish-tail Cadillacs are almost bumper to bumper along Lenox Avenue.” “A flashy car becomes their living room,” observed a black man from St. Louis remarking on the poor housing for black residents of the city.

Despite anecdotal sightings of black drivers in Cadillacs, in actuality these cars accounted for only 322 of the 9,644 black owned cars in Philadelphia in 1946. In Baltimore, only 154 African American households owned Cadillacs, placing them near the bottom of the preferred list, above De Sotos and below Huds in popularity. The 1969 study indicated that only 1 percent of black people in the country purchased Cadillacs and the belief that Negroes bought flashy cars was a stereotype. What is clear is the white community’s lack of recognition of the existence of a black middle class with the income sufficient to purchase quality consumer goods and a right to do so.

---

32 Ebony, 34.
33 Ibid.
37 Caruth and Barry, 25.
The popularity of Buicks among black buyers in the 1940s and 1950s may also have been a part of African Americans’ desire to purchase brands with a good reputation. Fearful of the often-inferior merchandise sold in black neighborhoods, African Americans were more concerned with quality merchandise than with getting a bargain. Buick’s reputation as a better brand, a car you could trust—a reliable machine—made it a top choice. Black consumers wanted to make sure they didn’t get stuck with inferior products just because they were black.39

An article in the *Negro Bulletin* speculated that “[a] long history of exploitation makes him [the Negro] wary of cheap, shoddy goods. . . a Negro will spend more of his salary on high priced goods than a white man.”40 Surveys of black Americans indicated preferences for Pepsi and Coca Cola over store brands of soda, and black people, no matter what their income levels, purchased well-known brands of baby food, hot cereal, and toiletries over generic varieties. Most consumers, black or white, preferred name brands to generics, but black consumers, unlike whites, distrusted low end and generic brands and even believed them to be tainted. They viewed with suspicion claims made by white salespeople. Would shop clerks tell a black buyer the truth, or would they sell them inferior or potentially dangerous merchandise? Conspiracy theorists mistrusted any “cheap” product that might be designed to attract poor people.41 “The Negro is sensitive

---

41 Several scholars have written about the persistence of rumor and legend in the African American community and the power of folklore to affect attitudes, relationships between the races, and even consumer behavior. Spencie Love, *One Blood* explores the legends surrounding
and is constantly on guard against deception,” claimed one market survey.\textsuperscript{42} In essence, name brands could be trusted. Cheaper generic brands could not. If white consumers purchased and trusted name brands, these products had to be safe. African American domestics learned about specific consumer products by using them in the homes of their employers. They chose these brands when making their own purchases, assuming that they were of good quality and could be trusted. “Many colored public service and domestic service workers buy almost identical brands and measure value by the same yardstick as their employers.”\textsuperscript{43} They were not mimicking white behavior; rather they believed that they were protecting their families.

In 1969, a Louis Harris poll indicated that both black and white automobile buyers preferred Chevrolets, Fords, and Pontiacs rather than Buicks or other large, heavy automobiles. Perhaps this change in tastes indicates that black consumers no longer needed cars large enough to carry a trunk full of supplies or large enough for sleeping. Black Americans gradually became more comfortable traveling across the United States and by the late 1960s found an increasing number of acceptable overnight accommodations, restaurants, and gas stations available to them. Passage of the Civil

\footnotesize
the death of Dr. Charles Drew as racial medical malpractice. Gary Fine and Patricia Turner’s \textit{Whispers on the Color Line} looks at current legends and rumors held by both African Americans and white Americans and how they contribute to the attitudes that each group holds about the other. Patricia Turner’s \textit{I Heard it Through the Grapevine}, rooted in psychoanalytic theory, offers an exploration of rumors and urban legends as folkloristic narrative and as a method of expressing deep racial fears and ongoing divisions in American culture between black and white Americans.

\textsuperscript{42} Baltimore, \textit{America’s Fifth Largest Negro Market}, 97.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 97
Rights Act of 1964 invalidated the Jim Crow laws, accelerated the process of integrating public accommodations, and eased the difficulty of travel for black motorists.44

When it came to buying fuel for their cars, African Americans also preferred nationally advertised brands of gasoline, and in exchange for their patronage they wanted companies to respond to their needs. Black consumers chose gas stations that emphasized courtesy and cleanliness over lower price.45 They were willing to trade lower price for better treatment. To insure a more positive experience at the gas pump black consumers would even drive across town if necessary.46 During one of many trips between Maine and Florida in the early 1960s, Morris Johnson and his wife Doris stopped at a gas station. As the attendant filled the tank, Morris asked the location of the bathroom. When told it was for whites only, Johnson calmly instructed the attendant to stop pumping the gas and paid the bill. The couple then drove across the street to the Esso station selling higher priced gas, inquired about their bathroom policy, and filled up. After this experience the Johnsons always chose Esso gasoline.47 Other African Americans found similar reasons to choose Esso gasoline. While most oil companies ignored the African American market, Esso placed advertisements in the black media welcoming patrons to Esso stations and offering the use of their clean rest rooms. “Esso’s consistently strong showing in the Negro markets,” commented the Philadelphia

45 Fred C Akers, "A Study of Negro and White Consumption Behavior Automobiles, Gasoline, Tires, and Batteries" (University of Chicago, 1966) 67-68.
46 Ibid.
Standard Oil, the parent company of Esso gasoline, aggressively reached out to the Negro market. In 1946 the company hired two African American marketers, James A Jackson and Wendell P. Alston, to convince black Americans that “Happy Motoring” (and the ability to use a gas station bathroom) came through the purchase of Esso gas and oil. Standard Oil was one of the first corporations to hire African American market agents to sell its products. Still, not every Esso station welcomed black customers with open arms.

Although African American consumers preferred name brands to generic brands, they did not simply purchase these products blindly. They actively worked to encourage businesses in cities around the country to hire black employees in other than menial positions. The most effective program to pressure corporations to expand their hiring took place in Philadelphia. Called “selective patronage,” the collaboration among more than 460 black ministers and their churches successfully influenced the management executives at thirty corporations. The Philadelphia Selective Patronage project of the 1960s, similar to the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” movement of the 1930s, was a campaign for economic withdrawal. Led by the city’s black middle class, selective patronage effectively demonstrated the power of the black consumer and the black church. Using handbills, posters, word of mouth, and Philadelphia’s pulpits, the ministers systematically urged their flocks to boycott particular products. Tastycakes were first to pile up on the shelves of Philadelphia markets because of their policy prohibiting blacks from being hired as salesmen, office workers, and skilled workers. The Tastycakes bakery boycott ended with African Americans in ten skilled and sales

positions. Selective patronage then targeted such companies as the Pepsi-Cola bottling plant, Breyer’s ice cream, and Gulf Oil companies.\textsuperscript{49} Middle class African Americans used boycotts to break Jim Crow hiring practices.

To most African Americans purchasing an automobile presented only opportunities. Black writers rarely warned of the negative affects of the automobile that appeared in the mainstream press—the dangers of speed, the potential for the destruction of rural communities, or the changes in long held traditions that came with the automobile age. To black Americans many of these changes were a good thing. Black publications generally did not mention aggressive and unethical automobile sales practices, suburban sprawl, or the toll on the environment wrought by exhaust emissions.\textsuperscript{50} To black motorists the automobile could never be the “devil wagon,” as some writers referred to it in the 1920s and 1930s. One 1933 article in the \textit{Negro History Bulletin} pointed out some of the pitfalls unique to black drivers. Aware of the popular study of Middletown, (Muncie, Indiana) author Lillian Rhodes compared the characteristics of that city with life in an anonymous black Pennsylvania community referred to as L______.

Middletown and L______ see the same shows, hear the same programs over the radio, and go to distant points in automobiles to parties, picnics, and ‘just to see the sights.’ It is an avenue of escape from the hum-drum of every day living.... When white Middletown comes back from an extended auto trip, the talk is of the pleasant incidents connected with it. Colored L______ talks, among other things, of the ‘Jim–Crow-ism’ it encounters at times at rest camps and service

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}
stations, and long discussions ensue over the race problem and a probable way out.\footnote{Lillian Rhodes, “One of the Groups Middletown Left Out,” \textit{Opportunity}, (March 1933): 767.} 

Although auto touring allowed African Americans to avoid some forms of discrimination and gave them greater freedom to travel when and where they pleased, car culture created new forms of discrimination. Gas stations and their “public” toilets, roadside restaurants, motels, tourist cabins, and the new establishments created to serve the growing vacation trade—resorts, beaches, and hotels along the highway offered separate facilities for African Americans or refused altogether to serve black travelers. “When we would stop to get food,” noted, professional baseball player “Mudcat” Grant of his experiences on the road, “the white players could go in the restaurant, but we couldn’t. So…we would eat in the kitchen because they had black cooks in the kitchen. And, of course, we ate better in the kitchen than we would have.”\footnote{“Mudcat” Grant, interview with Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, July 30, 2006.} In Jim Crow America, as new barriers to access were created, African American entrepreneurs created facilities to serve black drivers and their passengers in black communities around the country, taking advantage of the automobile-created need for tourist accommodations, hotels, road-houses, bars, and restaurants. Most of these African American establishments were located in communities with significant black populations. Entrepreneurs with limited capital simply opened their houses as tourist cottages serving hearty breakfasts and sometimes dinners in addition to providing rooms for the night with their families. Other black businessmen opened garages and gas stations.

For some African drivers worried about the safety of their families made travel a miserable experience. Valerie Cunningham remembered every car trip as a distressing
experience influenced by her father’s obvious anxiety. He hated driving and he hated being outside of their neighborhood. Mr. Cunningham started drinking water when he was nervous and during a car trip he drank water from a mayonnaise jar constantly. “My father. . .I don’t think he ever really got comfortable driving in the car, you know. Just driving fifty or sixty miles up to the White Mountains was an ordeal for him. It made him nervous. Driving fifty miles to Boston was an ordeal for him.” Valerie’s father feared so much the dangers of driving for African Americans that he never took his wife and child south to visit relatives. Perhaps his wife’s very fair complexion and his own clearly dark skin intensified his concern. If someone mistook her for a white woman there would be hell to pay. “[Y]ou had to be prepared, you know, for whatever might happen on the road.”

Spencer Crew’s family never traveled far from home—never more than two hours drive and then only to visit relatives. They never went to standard vacation spots, the beach, or to National Parks. His parents kept the family safe by always planning ahead and knowing where they were going and how to get there. Although his father owned and loved his light blue Thunderbird, it was much more relaxing just to stay home. Traveling just created too much stress. For some African Americans driving anxiety made staying at home more appealing than taking to the road.

Accidents posed a particular danger for African Americans on the road and could be an extremely frightening experience. For black drivers or passengers, involvement in a simple traffic accident could quite literally put their lives in jeopardy. The neighborhood in which the accident took place was the first concern. Black drivers in a

---

white neighborhood often invited the curiosity of hostile law enforcement officers or, worse, attacks by violent mobs. Natchez, Mississippi electrician Willie Wallace remembered an accident as a young driver and the unfair treatment he received from the policeman. “I remember one night a [white] lady was coming around the corner, ran into me. She was drunk.” When the policeman arrived he sent the woman home so that he could take care of her “problem.” “Of course I got the bulk of it,” remembered Willie, “because they were saying that we both hit each other, when I never did anything. But that's the way policeman wrote it up, to protect this lady.” Some prescriptive literature encouraged black drivers involved in an accident simply to admit fault, exchange information, and leave the scene as quickly as possible. “Mudcat” Grant advised that the best course of action was to stay in your car and away from the driver of the other vehicle. “If the person was white that the accident was against, you stayed away from them, because you didn’t want anything to happen. So, when the police showed up, you had all your credentials and made sure that everything was proper.”

Hospitals and ambulance services throughout the country were often segregated prior to the 1960s, complicating the response to an accident. The African American health care community did not support the segregated system of care, but felt that it was necessary given the nation’s attitudes toward blacks. “We don’t wish anyone to get the idea that we condone these discriminations, which will some day be corrected.” wrote John A. Kenney, the Medical Director of Newark, New Jersey’s Booker T. Washington

56 “Mudcat” Grant, interview with Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, July 30, 2006
Community Hospital in 1939. “[B]ut what are we to do while this slow evolutionary process is developing?” Without a black ambulance service or a black hospital nearby, even a minor injury could become life threatening. Relatively few black hospitals like Newark’s Community Hospital (1927-1953) or Detroit’s Mercy General Hospital (1917-1976) existed around the country, and many were understaffed and poorly equipped to handle traumatic injuries. Many white hospitals refused to admit black patients or kept them segregated in a “colored ward.” These hospitals also refused privileges to black doctors and nurses so that black patients, even if they were admitted to the hospital, could not be cared for by their own physicians. Before and during World War II, hospitals segregated blood, a practice that disadvantaged both black and white patients. The American Red Cross continued to separate black and white blood until at least 1949.

In many communities the black ambulance driver was also the funeral director and used his hearse to transport both the injured and the dead. The availability of an ambulance for black victims might depend on whether or not the driver happened to be on his way to the cemetery when the ambulance was needed. The hospitals’ policy on admitting black patients, and the bigotry of emergency workers, police, and hospitals, often determined one’s ability to survive an automobile accident. W.E. B DuBois devoted one of his columns in Crisis Magazine to the untimely death of his friend Juliette Derricotte, Dean at Fisk University, and Nina Johnson, an undergraduate student in her

---

57 The Kellogg African American Health Care project of the University of Michigan Medical School is an online resource that documents black hospitals and black healthcare in Michigan. The oral histories describe conditions in the hospitals and the discrimination faced by the physicians and hospital staff. The site also includes photographs, primary documents, and hospital plans. http://www.med.umich.edu/haahc/aboutpro.htm accessed January 2, 2009; Booker T. Washington Community Hospital Association, The Community Hospital: a Brief History (Newark, New Jersey: Board of Trustees of the Community Hospital, 1939) 5.
senior year. DuBois was outraged by the treatment the women received and attempted to dispassionately present every detail of their ordeal. A group of four women decided to drive from Nashville, Tennessee to Dalton, Georgia “to avoid the Jim-crow cars of the South, and the difficulty in getting meals and other transportation.” The details of the crash were quite vague, but the pattern of discrimination and inhumanity was clear. At first no ambulance responded. The black funeral director finally arrived and carted the women to several local white physicians in his hearse. Although the doctors discovered serious injuries, the women were neither treated nor taken to the modern hospital in the city. Instead they were transported over bumpy roads to the home of a black woman who regularly cared for the sick. She treated them to the best of her ability but their lives ebbed away. Other witnesses at the scene of the accident noted that the house was filthy, and nothing was done to save Derricotte and Johnson’s lives or to alleviate their pain. They suffered for hours before dying. “In the light of this,” DuBois asked, “what shall be said of the civilization of Dalton, Georgia?”

In the event of an accident, health care along the road varied dramatically from place to place for black Americans. Race was an essential question when calling the emergency room, and it was often the first question that dispatchers asked. Historian Kenneth Jackson was the first person to arrive on the scene of a terrible automobile accident in Memphis in 1960. “The fire hydrant was sheared off,” Jackson remembered “and was spewing water everywhere. There was an Oldsmobile upside down. People

were badly hurt. I called the emergency number—the equivalent of 911 at that time—the first question they asked me was, were the people black or white? The most important question when people were dying was what race are they!”

Precisely where should a Negro get hurt, asked writer Esther Jones in 1932, bemoaning the terrible treatment received by black patients at many of the nation’s hospitals and clinics. In Tennessee African Americans might have a chance of getting a hospital bed, but there might be problems if the accident occurred in Chicago or Birmingham. Overall, Jones found healthcare for African Americans woefully inadequate across the country, and she concluded, “it is really best for the Negro not to get hurt at all anywhere.”

Tired black motorists faced the added danger of a traffic melee in an inhospitable neighborhood, and, as one writer noted, most places in the country might be considered inhospitable.

The highway took its greatest toll among those who traveled regularly for their work. “Many Negro casualties are among show people,” observed an article in Our World magazine. Traveling late at night, often tired from a performance and anxious to reach another city to get some sleep before the next show, singers and bands were involved in dozens of automobile accidents. Their inability to find hotel rooms in many of the towns they played in necessitated the late night trips. Traveling at four A.M. toward Jacksonville, Florida, Earl Bostic’s Fleetwood Cadillac plowed into the rear of a gasoline truck. Bostic, an alto saxophone player, was sleepy, having performed into the wee hours of the morning. Fortunately, he and his passengers who were traveling with

---

61 Ibid
singer Dinah Washington, were not killed. Many others were not as lucky. In 1937, the great blues singer Bessie Smith, her arm almost severed in the impact, died after a late night automobile accident. The tragedy immediately raised questions about the circumstances surrounding Smith’s death. Some reports erroneously noted that she bled to death while being driven by ambulance to multiple hospitals, searching for one that would admit her. The details of her death continued to be clouded by such rumors, and a play written in 1960 by Edward Albee fixed in the minds of many in the African American community the story that racism and neglect killed Bessie Smith. Although rumors were readily believed because they conformed to well known experiences, biographer Chris Albertson interviewed witnesses to Smith’s treatment following the crash and in a 1972 biography concluded that she probably died because of serious internal injuries and not because of the lack of treatment. The rumors could develop and persist, however, because of the lack of medical treatment that blacks often endured after car accidents.

So suspicious was the black community about African American deaths following automobile accidents that even when racism and neglect could not be blamed for a death, as in the case of Bessie Smith, the black community refused to believe the reports.

Rumors surrounding the death of well-known black personalities in car accidents

---

63 Bessie Smith was born in 1892 in Tennessee. She was the most popular black entertainer of the 1920s recording such hits as *Down Hearted Blues*, *Gulf Coast Blues*, *St. Louis Gal*, and *Chicago Bound Blues*. On September 26, 1937, Smith was traveling on Route 61 to Clarksdale, Mississippi from Memphis, Tennessee. Richard Morgan, her lover, was driving. He survived the accident. Smith, who was riding with her right arm out the window, was severely injured in the crash; her arm was almost completely severed. Smith did not arrive at the hospital promptly, an issue that later caused the questions about her care. At Clarksdale's black hospital her right arm was amputated, but blood loss was severe. She never regained consciousness.
pervaded African American communities. Some of the stories took on the force of legend. Dr. Charles Drew, the brilliant, young surgeon who conducted pioneering research in blood storage and blood transfusions, was killed in a tragic car accident in North Carolina in 1950. Leaving Washington, D.C. late one March night, Drew set out with three other physicians in a Buick roadster for a conference in Tuskegee, Alabama. Because of the difficulty of finding a hotel, the group planned to drive through the night. While his companions napped, Drew apparently fell asleep at the wheel. Although the white doctors who treated him at the segregated Alamance Hospital recognized him and did all that they could to save him, he died of his injuries. His death was not a product of malpractice, but the legend that the father of blood banking died by bleeding to death at the hands of heartless racists persists to this day. Historian Spencie Love postulates that the strength of the Drew legend illustrates the incredibly destructive psychological trauma that racism caused in American life. Despite the falsehood of the details, in Charles Drew’s death African Americans heard an ironic cautionary tale of the dangers of the highway. A doctor whose specialty was blood and who had saved so many lives during World War II died as a result of blood loss, according to the legend. Despite their best efforts, even for the black middle class, there was no American meritocracy. Even the smartest, most important black man, on the road, was just another nigger.\footnote{Spencie Love, \textit{One Blood: The Death and Resurrection of Charles R. Drew} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 32-58.}

But the Charles Drew story has an even more tragic extension. Drew represented the unknown numbers of African American men and women who actually did die from car accidents because of racism. In this group was twenty-four year old World War II
veteran and A&T College student Maltheus Avery. Avery died in the same county in
North Carolina and in the same year as Charles Drew, but unlike Drew, Avery died of
medical neglect, proving that the fear reflected in the Drew legend had merit. In
December, 1950, Avery’s Pontiac hit a furniture truck on Route 70 about 30 miles
outside of Greensboro, North Carolina. The ambulance took him to the local hospital,
Alamance General, a segregated facility with only five beds in the basement for colored
patients. Avery had a traumatic head injury and Alamance’s emergency room doctor
quickly transferred him to the larger and better-equipped Duke University Hospital.
Avery’s second ambulance ride was a trip of thirty-five miles. With all fifteen of Duke’s
“Negro” beds full, the hospital staff there claims to have given Avery “supportive
measures” during his ten minute stay in their emergency room and then sent him, now
dying, on to Lincoln Hospital, the black hospital. There this married father of a young
child died within minutes, never regaining consciousness. Quite possibly in 1950
Avery’s injuries would have resulted in his death even if he had been admitted to
Alamance or Duke.65 His injuries were extremely serious. But the reality of the
automobile age for African Americans was that automobile ownership and travel were
fraught with dangers that existed precisely because of race prejudice. Black travelers’
willingness to confront these challenges was indeed a courageous act.

65Ibid., 218-222.
A few writers believed that a desire to display their middle class status was the motivation that encouraged black drivers to purchase fancy cars. The ways that African American families used their cars suggest other explanations. Black families and businessmen chose their automobiles using different criteria than those of white drivers, and status was only a small part of the equation. While Jim Crow customs were designed to keep black Americans locked in the segregated past, African Americans embraced the automobile was a modern invention that could help them gain freedom and travel security. They bought roomy, reliable, and powerful cars to help them overcome the inconvenience and perils of segregation. African Americans aspired to the same freedom, security, and status that attracted other strivers. They purchased automobiles in lower numbers than white Americans did, but in large numbers never the less. The car facilitated movement into places they had never ventured before. With this freedom of movement they challenged deeply entrenched customs of racial segregation and white supremacy.

Chapter Three
Navigating in a Hostile Environment
“The stop for fuel would be the only stop made”

My grandfather, Abel Wooten, died in North Carolina the year after my parents moved to New Jersey and several years before my birth. It was 1948. He had been sick for some time. The call came from my mother’s sister, my aunt Nell, late in the day and my parents prepared to leave immediately. They would drive straight through the night. Half way to my mother’s childhood home in North Carolina the electrical system in their old car “went haywire,” as my father recalled. The lights just flickered and went out. They sat by the side of the road nervously waiting. Miraculously, whatever seized the electrical system let go. They didn’t have to look for a garage. The lights came back on, and they continued their solemn journey, arriving in North Carolina early the next morning. The first time I heard this story it did not seem peculiar that my parents did not stop for the night on the drive to Fayetteville. After all, time was of the essence, my grandfather was dying. Sadly, my mother and father did not arrive before my grandfather died, and, as the tale goes, the car’s lights “went haywire” at the precise moment of his death. The story, one of those marvelous spiritual tales of passing over, was told repeatedly at family gatherings.

When I was a child growing up in the 1950s, the entire family often made the same trip to my mother’s hometown that my parents had made the evening of my grandfather’s death. And we always drove straight through. Sometimes we took the train, but usually we rose at five in the morning or earlier and got on the New Jersey
Turnpike before dawn, my brother and I riding in the “wayback” of the black Ford station wagon playing games or dozing on plump pillows brought from our beds. The trip from Newark to Fayetteville (pronounced “Fedville” by the locals) took more than 10 hours. We stopped only to picnic from a green metal Coleman cooler that my mother packed with fried chicken wrapped in aluminum foil, potato salad, brownies, and soda. It was the only time of year that she fried chicken or that we upwardly mobile middle class Negroes were allowed to eat it. As we headed south, her thoughts turned to the life she had left far behind.

Figure 3:1 Gary and Gretchen Sullivan behind the Sullivan family station wagon. The car, full of fried chicken, apple pie, coloring books, and pillows for sleeping, made the trip from New Jersey back to my mother’s home in North Carolina each summer. c. 1957, Collection of the author
My brother Gary and I assumed that the drive through the early morning hours was something everyone did on summer vacations. I attributed these marathons to my father’s enthusiasm for the road and on the way home, to his loathing of Fayetteville, but it seems to me now that something else was afoot. I know that many families, black and white, traveled on vacations in the wee hours of the morning. But, why did these trips make my father so anxious? Was there a particular reason to drive straight through? And why, when my parents were in such a rush to get to my grandfather’s bedside, did they sit quietly in the car for a time instead of contacting a mechanic?

Travel by car opened up the “geographical imagination” of Americans, says Catherine Gudis, enabling them to choose where they could go instead of being bound by train tracks.¹ Geographer Karl Raitz has described the American roadside as both a physical and a social construction that became a private vernacular and undisciplined landscape. Although the highway was a public space, presumably open to all, the roadside represented private interests.² The roadside “enables travel along the road,” as Raitz points out, but it also supported white supremacy and Jim Crow laws. Independence was severely circumscribed for African American motorists as they looked out across the vast and growing American highway system and saw a landscape dotted with hostile signs and demeaning images that made them feel unwelcome. Magazine articles reported the concerns that black people felt about taking vacations. “Travel for Negroes inside the borders of the United States,” noted the Saturday Review, “can

---
become an experience so fraught with humiliation and unpleasantness that most colored people simply never think of a vacation in the same terms as the rest of America.”

When stopping at gas station rest rooms, hotels, and restaurants African Americans were likely to encounter embarrassing rejections. Black parents sheltered their children by stopping as infrequently as possible until they reached a physically and emotionally “safe” destination. African Americans often preferred to drive directly to their destinations in a black community or one of the limited number of black resorts like American Beach in Florida, Oak Bluffs on Martha’s Vineyard, or Idlewild in northwestern Michigan.

In our childish naiveté my brother and I didn’t realize it, but our parents certainly understood that each time we left the safety of our comfortable, integrated, and middle class neighborhood in Newark where we felt accepted and safe, we were embarking on a potentially perilous adventure. Travel and vacation experiences for African Americans were adventures in the unknown. The speed of the automobile and the materials of which it was constructed—metal and glass—created a sense of security that persuaded many families to take a chance and traverse potentially hostile spaces. A growing number of middle class black families took summer vacations as the century wore on; the steadily increasing crop of black executives in American corporations found that they needed to travel for business purposes. As Esso Standard Oil executive James Avery wrote, “While the formidable task of proving oneself capable of doing a job as well as anyone else was a demanding one, traveling as a Black representative in sales promotion,

---

public relations and marketing in the ‘40s and ’50s and, in fact, before the passage of the
Civil Rights Act of 1964, was a real challenge.”

By custom and by statute, African Americans were expected to refrain from mingling with whites in most social situations. Unfamiliar places—public accommodations such as restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, and swimming pools—offered opportunities for potentially unpleasant encounters for black travelers. No matter how well dressed or respectable they looked, African Americans discovered that they were not welcome in many parts of the country and they were only tolerated in others, despite their middle class status.

As many writers have shown, race was an organizing factor of place. The nation was divided by a confusing maze of laws creating legal segregation that differed by state. These laws made travel across state lines extremely confusing for African Americans. Combined with long established customs and traditions, Jim Crow laws separated people into racial categories and placed them into white spaces and black spaces. Prior to the 1960s, relatively few spaces outside of some poor residential

---

6 In 1961, the women’s division of Christian Service of the Methodist Church commissioned attorney Pauli Murray to research and write a book identifying the segregation laws in each state to distinguish racial custom and tradition from statute. The book, States’ Laws on Race and Color, records a dizzying array of over 700 pages of regulations governing illegal conduct between black and white people in each state.
neighborhoods were integrated. A considerable number of white Americans believed that keeping geographic spaces all-white enabled them to maintain good schools, high property values, less crime, and high social status. Idealized white places—such places as resorts, golf courses, hotels, beaches, and restaurants—were constructed through the exclusion of black people, the perceived source of social problems. When middle class black Americans traveled along the nation’s highways they invaded these white spaces.

Historian Robert Weyeneth categorized the two architectural forms created to keep black people and white people apart and in their designated white and black spaces—segregated space and partitioned spaces. Segregated spaces provided separate and usually unequal places designed to insure that blacks and whites would not have intimate contacts within the public sphere. Partitioned spaces used walls, ropes, or signs to keep blacks and whites apart within a single architectural space. Parks, restaurants, swimming pools, and country clubs that excluded one race or the other in an attempt to prevent all contact are examples of segregated spaces. Divided or partitioned spaces—waiting rooms separated by a wall or a rope, or movie houses with the balcony set aside

---

7 Dozens of books trace the history of racial segregation in housing. An excellent recent overview is Stephen Grant Meyer’s As Long as They Don’t Live Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); The Institute on Poverty at the University Of Wisconsin developed an Index of Racial Segregation for 109 cities in the United States from 1940 to 1970. Most monographs on the history of suburbanization also include discussions of how the growth of the suburbs affected the partitioning of space along racial lines. See for example, Kenneth Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: the Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Mary Patillo-McCoy, Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

for black moviegoers, provided less costly alternatives to building duplicate structures.\textsuperscript{9} The vast majority of the space in the country was white space and reflected the feelings of the dominant culture that fraternization among people with light skin and people with dark skin was not good for American society. A survey undertaken at Fisk University in 1938 by sociologist Charles S. Johnson confirmed the depth of belief in the color line.\textsuperscript{10} Johnson found that the traditions of racial segregation in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century constituted “a dynamic racial orthodoxy or ideology which rationalizes the race system and provides a philosophical bulwark for it.”\textsuperscript{11}

Both methods of segregation—partition and separation—were based on one’s appearance and affected one’s ability to travel safely. Your race, or perhaps more accurately, your color and appearance determined where it was appropriate, safe, and possible to go. Simply by looking, a merchant, a service station attendant, or a lifeguard determined a person’s worthiness to enter. If a question arose, a person might be asked


\textsuperscript{10} Fisk Sociologist Charles Johnson’s study of segregation was undertaken in urban and rural areas both north and south. The survey was supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and was originally undertaken by Gunnar Myrdal. Charles S. Johnson, \textit{Patterns of Negro Segregation} (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943).

\textsuperscript{11} Johnson, \textit{Patterns of Negro Segregation}, 1948. Schools in twenty-one states either required or permitted black and white children to be educated in separate facilities by law. Robert Weyeneth, “The Architecture of Racial Segregation: the Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past,” \textit{The Public Historian} 27, No. 4 (2005): 15. In many states the law even separated the insane and the “feeble-minded” by race. In Texas it was unlawful for African Americans and white Americans to face one another in the boxing ring. California (like most other states) outlawed miscegenation, fearing the eventual amalgamation of the races and a decline in the purity of the white race. Delaware authorized separate hospitals to care for “colored tubercular” patients, and Tennessee legislated the creation of separate washrooms for the workers in the state’s mining industry. South Carolina mandated separate tent entrances for circus goers, although domestic servants accompanying children to otherwise segregated facilities were permitted to sit with their charges. Pauli Murray, ed. \textit{State Laws on Race and Color}, (Cincinnati: Women’s Division of Christian Service, 1952) 55, 72, 408, 418, 437, 443.
to confirm his or her identity. One evening after a concert a confused hotel desk clerk, unable to determine the race of a client by looking at her, asked Marion Anderson, “are you a Negro?”12 South Carolina and other southern states were so anxious to insure that black drivers were not being accidentally treated with the same rights as white drivers that they gave white drivers special “police powers” to request racial information from any other passenger to make sure that no light-skinned blacks sat in the white sections.13

Social segregation was particularly disconcerting because African American travelers never knew when or where it was in force. They might find a service station perfectly willing to serve them, or they might be refused service. A store clerk might be cordial or hostile. How one might be received depended on the region of the country, the attitudes of the community, and the personal predilections of the hotel, restaurant, or business owner. As African American travelers used the interstate highways to go outside of black communities, they found white businessmen often anxious to take their cash, but equally anxious to maintain the color line. Businesses willingly provided goods to black Americans as long as blacks “went around back,” used a separate facility, or did not wish to try on the merchandise before purchasing it. An African American student recounted buying a soda in Norfolk, Virginia. The soda jerk served him, but he was not permitted to sit down to enjoy his drink. Once he finished, the glass was intentionally broken.14 The unpredictability and potential danger of the landscape for African

12 Discrimination in travel was often based on appearance. If the hotel clerk, gas station attendant, or restaurant waiter determined that you looked like a Negro you would no receive service.
13 Murray, State Laws on Race and Color, 419.
14 George Schuyler, “Keeping the Negro in His Place,” The American Mercury 17 (August 1929): 470.
American travelers made the roadside a hostile environment. Singer Mahalia Jackson succinctly explained the panic that she felt when leaving an evening’s performance to get on the road for the late night drive to the next town where she would perform:

But the minute I left the concert hall I felt as if I had stepped back into the jungle. My accompanist Mildred Falls and I were traveling in my car, a Cadillac. My cousin, John Stevens, a young actor and drama teacher from Chicago, was doing the driving. From Virginia to Florida it was a nightmare. There was no place for us to eat or sleep on the main highways. Restaurants wouldn't serve us. Teen-age white girls who were serving as car hops would come bouncing out to the car and stop dead when they saw we were Negroes, spin around without a word and walk away. Some gasoline stations didn't want to sell us gas and oil. Some told us no restrooms were available. The looks of anger at the sight of us colored folks sitting in a nice car were frightening to see.15

Despite the singer’s wealth and broad popularity, when she was on the road she was just like any other black woman.

As a new landscape built around the needs of the automobile developed in the United States, signs, symbols, billboards, advertisements, and markers helped travelers to navigate as they cruised along the highway. Local business owners used signs to alert tourists to their hotels, local attractions, and restaurants. Gas stations and other automobile-related concerns competed to draw consumers with signs in ever increasing sizes. Billboards advertised consumer products for the split second of attention a driver and passengers could give as they whizzed by. In addition to providing directional information many of these markers also defined the land as white space and as off-limits, unfriendly, or even hostile to black motorists.

Before the 1920s little thought went into the placement of signs or the length of their messages, but by the 1920s and 1930s advertisers and road designers knew that size, message, and strategic placement determined a sign’s effectiveness. “Scientific” sign designers determined precisely what motorists could read as they moved through the countryside and how large signs should be to attract attention. The Burma Shave signs, popular in the 1920s, were spaced for ease of reading at precisely eighteen-seconds apart for a car traveling at 35 miles per hour.\(^\text{16}\)

Most highway signs were race neutral. Some signs said simply—Route 66, or just stated the name of a town—NEWARK. But some signs displayed messages that must have intimidated black travelers, some reinforced the prevailing racial code of etiquette and social distance. Others threatened physical violence to discourage black people from stopping in particular places. One of the most famous and well-traveled highways in the country served as a constant reminder to black travelers of the oppression of slavery and the nation’s view of the Confederacy as an idyllic era. Built to unite the South and the Midwest, the Dixie Highway extended south as far as Florida and north to Canada. African American families who migrated to the North often used the Dixie Highway as they went south to visit relatives. The two mainlines of the Dixie were completed in 1927. That same year, federal legislation assigned a system of numbers to replace highway names. The Dixie Highway did not fit into the numbering system because it had multiple routes and route numbers. Well established in the popular

\(^{16}\) Burma Shave signs consisted of six small signs spaced evenly along the road each bearing a few words of a poetic jingle that were read consecutively. For example, “Does your husband / Misbehave / Grunt and grumble / Rant and rave / Shoot the brute some / Burma-Shave;” Jakle and Sculle, 41.
imagination, roads like the Dixie often retained their quaint names. The originator of the road’s name believed that it represented the coming together of the North and the South after the big war. For white northerners the Dixie represented reunification of the Union; but for white southerners the road represented the persistence in the modern world of their old glory and “idyllic” past. The road’s name reminded African Americans of a terrifying and disgraceful period in American history. Like the Confederate national anthem that celebrated the land and its most celebrated institution—slavery—the Dixie Highway humiliated and frightened black people. Just thinking about the Dixie Highway and what its name meant scared journalist John Williams during his car trip around the country. “Ominously all directions to Nashville were via the Dixie Highway,” he wrote. “Where did it end, the Dixie Highway—in a cotton patch surmounted by a Confederate flag and an a capella choir of White Citizen Council members singing *Dixie*?”

---

Figure 3:2 This roadside sign was one of many that identified the Dixie Highway that ran from Florida almost to the Canadian border. Depending on your identity, the name of the Dixie Highway held different meanings. For some white motorists it inspired a sense of pride of place. For some African American motorists it was a frightening reminder of slavery and racism in the antebellum south. Reproduced by permission of Berea College, Appalachian Center, Appalachian Studies Teaching Collection.

Road signs constituted the most obvious and arbitrary form of racial intimidation along the landscape. Each state, municipality, or town erected its own signs. Sometimes signs were hand-lettered and posted by an individual, a business, or a religious group. At other times the community or some group within the community sanctioned the sentiments on the sign. In Greenville, Texas, the town slogan, “the blackest land, the whitest people,” appeared on a banner across Main Street and was painted on the water tower. The slogan also appeared as a neon sign and on a souvenir postcard of an automobile-lined downtown street in the 1940s. The phrase “the blackest land” referred to the rich, dark soil in the region that supported cotton farming. At least as early as 1892
the area was described as “one of the richest blackland counties.” The addition of “the whitest people” to the slogan may have come in the early twentieth century with the immigration of Mexicans into the area and the increase in the number of poor whites and tenant farmers created by the Depression. Although the local white residents did not believe the sign to be offensive, African Americans found it startling and terrifying. One traveler to Greenville during her childhood found the experience of the banner one of the worst memories of her young life: “I grew up in Texas during Jim Crow,” remembered law professor Vernellia Randall. “During that time going on long distance road trips had a distinct flavor for Blacks and I remember it vividly - the packing enough food for the entire trip (no restaurants), the using the bathroom on the side of the road (no gas station bathrooms), the sleeping in the car on the side of the road (no motels). But my most vivid memory of my road trips in Texas was the sign I read every time we went through Greenville, Texas - The Blackest Land, The Whitest People.”

The sign seen by black travelers like Vernellia Randall’s family in the 1940s and 1950s confirmed generally held African American views about Greenville as a place to avoid. In 1908, the town accused a black man of raping a white woman and burned him to death in the town square. The banner’s words paled in comparison to the town’s reputation as a dangerous place and a site of mob violence, but contributed to the perception that nothing had changed, even as late as the 1960s.

21 Information on the history of Greenville, Texas can be found in Neil Foley, The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture Berkley: University of California
Figure 3:3 The banner across the Main Street in Greenville, Texas identified the town as having the blackest land and the whitest people. Such unfriendly messages frightened black travelers. Reproduced by permission of the Curt Teich Archive

Jim crow signs clearly delineated racial space. As black motorists traveled, even those who had never seen a Jim Crow sign stumbled upon them on buildings, in train cars, and in public gathering places in the southern states. While the vast majority of these signs were found below the Mason Dixon line, other regions used them as well, Jim Crow signs contributed to the omnipresent visual assault on African Americans at hotels, water fountains, theaters, restaurants, swimming pools, beaches, train stations, and just about any other public place in the country. A 1941 issue of the New York Amsterdam-Star News printed photographs of a number of Jim Crow signs in Harlem, where more black Americans lived than any place else. The article’s author, Sam Slaymaker, cited many landlords throughout the neighborhood who advertised for “white tenants” with

signs placed prominently on their premises. To capture the attention of potential white renters, the signs usually noted the provision of “all improvements” and “bath” to assure interested parties that although the neighborhood was black, the apartments were of superior quality. In some of these dwellings, rents were charged according to the tenant’s color—higher prices if you happened to be black. “Harlemites don’t have to wait for complaints to come in from Georgia or Alabama,” noted Slaymaker. “There are plenty of instances in which we’re actually barred from enjoying citizenship rights in the heart of the world’s largest all-colored community.”

Anywhere in the United States a black person might encounter dozens of offensive Jim Crow signs each day.

—

Figure 3: Jim Crow signs came in a wide variety of forms from this homemade sign to signs professionally printed by a sign painter. Large corporations like bus and railroad companies used mass produced paper signs that were professionally printed. Professional signs produced by corporations to keep their business establishments all white indicate that Jim Crow signs did not simply represent the racist ideas of “good ole boys in the back woods,” but rather institutionalized American racism. African Americans understood that segregation was widely accepted within American culture. Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution Collection, National Museum of American History, Behring Center

Jim Crow signs seem to have been particularly startling when they appeared unexpectedly, offending some white as well as black citizens. The National Parks were places where these signs seemed particularly out of place. Many African Americans visited the national parks because they believed that the Park Service’s non-discrimination policy created a safe haven for black travelers—a sanctuary from the assault in other public areas. Letters to the Secretary of the Interior express both the shock and outrage some park visitors felt when they confronted racial signs in the wilderness areas set aside for all Americans to enjoy. Edwin Salpeter, a Cornell college
professor, writing in 1951 complained following a visit to Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. Writing to the Director of the National Park Service, Salpeter expressed his dismay that a privately operated restaurant on federal property discriminated against black patrons. In the window of a café a prominently displayed sign read, “No Coloured Trade Solicited.” “[I]t seems a pity that some of these establishments are run on lines contrary to the ‘benefit and enjoyment of all the people of the USA,’” wrote Salpeter.23

Figure 3:5 FSA photographer Ben Shahn snapped this photograph of a Jim Crow sign painted on a restaurant window in Lancaster, Ohio in 1938. The sign, a semi-permanent fixture, was obviously added to the window by a professional sign painter. The use of the word “cater” suggests that the establishment considers its service high class and the rest of the sign explicitly states that such high class service is suitably only for whites. The North as well as the South supported the segregation of African Americans. Courtesy, Farm-Security Administration photograph, Library of Congress

23Letter from E.E. Salpeter to Charles Drury, Director, National Park Service 15 October 1951 Papers of the National Park Service, Entry 7a Administrative files, 1949-71 W4633 General regulation, Discrimination in Furnishing Public Accommodations, National Archives.
Jim Crow signs did not keep black people from the vast majority of beaches, restaurants, and tourist accommodations north of the Mason Dixon line. Rather, custom and tradition blocked admission. Journalist John Williams described the process he used as he tried to find a motel room while traveling. “I found myself picking out places to stop or, rather, letting them pick me out,” he wrote. “It worked like this: you begin to drive more slowly. The eye drifts over this motel or that, seeking some instinctive assurance that you will not have to put your life on the line by asking for a single for the night.” Williams noted that even though twenty-nine states prohibited discrimination in public accommodations in 1964, discrimination continued. Even in cities that had large black communities like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, black tourists were often turned away.24 “Around the corner from 319 [St. Nicholas Avenue] at 270 Hancock Street, [in Harlem] you’ll find another Jim Crow house. . . but this time no signs,” commented a newspaper article.25 Ironically, Jim Crow signs, by eliminating the need to wonder whether a restaurant or hotel might be hospitable to African American guests, eased the uncertainty about whether or not an establishment might be welcoming. At the same time the signs heightened the demoralizing affects of racism.

A few Jim Crow signs started to come down in the 1950s, in response to federal legislation, but some politicians and policemen continued to enforce discrimination. Police Commissioner Clyde Sellers of Montgomery, Alabama refused to protect the rights of black travelers and enforced segregation even after the City’s signs were

24 Williams, This is My Country Too, 18.
removed. A black newspaper reporter commented on the refusal of some black southerners to defy Jim Crow traditions even when the “white” and “colored” signs were removed from the waiting rooms in Birmingham and Montgomery railroad stations.

“Some Negroes act like the signs are still there,” the reporter noted. Most establishments outside of the south offered no outward signs indicating racial discrimination. In a democratic society that boasted of its freedom such signs appeared hypocritical and undemocratic. Instead, black people were simply expected to know when and where they were not welcome. Particularly prior to the 1960s, African Americans were expected to stay away from most public accommodations. Describing the racial climate at the beach in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for example, reporter George Schuyler reported that black tourists intuitively knew not to try to use the public showers or the changing cabanas:

If they wish to dive into the Atlantic, they must come to the beach in an automobile, put on their bathing-suits behind the car’s curtains, and drive back to the Negro ghetto for a shower afterwards. If a Negro had no automobile—and most of them haven’t—then he is out of luck.

Charles Johnson’s study found a similar reticence to approach other types of facilities including restaurants, hotels, stores, and residential neighborhoods in the North as well as the South, even though no signs explicitly prohibited black people from entering. As a result of this uncertain environment, Johnson argues, middle class African Americans used avoidance to prevent embarrassment and to maintain self-respect.

Without clear guidelines about what was off limits, African Americans were left to cope with all forms of segregation with whatever tools they could gather: getting word-of-

---

28 Schuyler, “Keeping the Negro in His Place,” 471.
29 Johnson, Patterns of Negro Segregation, 267-293.
mouth recommendations, avoiding particular towns with reputations for racial violence, reading the faces of people on the street, or purchasing one of several travel guides designed to help black travelers identify friendly establishments.

The most intimidating and frightening signs along American highways were in essence “keep out” signs, warning African Americans to stay out of a particular town or place after sundown. Typical language read, “Nigger, don’t let the sun set with you in this town.” Some signs underscored intimidation with mockery and racism, such as, “run nigger. If you can’t read, run anyway.” Such “sundown” town signs appeared in communities all over the country. Sylvester Hollis of Birmingham, Alabama remembered seeing a variety of offensive signs along the road and in various establishments in Cullman, Alabama when he was a boy in the 1950s. “We saw signs like that all the time. There were lots of signs along the highway.” Hollis particularly remembered the local Citgo station with its sign that read, “No niggers allowed in this service station or bathroom.”

Figure 3:6 This linoleum print by artists Tony Perez and Lin Shi Khan documents the sundown town signs that appeared along American highways. The print appeared in a 1935 collection of prints developed in response to the crisis of lynching in the United States. Nothing is known about the artists.

Some white communities proudly announced the presence of the Ku Klux Klan within town borders on highway signs that read, “Welcome to Klan Country.” Palo Alto, California’s Klan painted “KKK” in red letters, three feet high, at the intersection of Homer Avenue and Ramona Street in 1946.31 Klan signs indicated both acceptance of the Klan and hostility to African Americans, and they warned black people to stay away. Knowledge that the Ku Klux Klan was nearby struck fear in the hearts of most black travelers, so strong was the Klan’s association with lynching and lawlessness.

During the 1920s the second Ku Klux Klan portrayed itself as a popular social club, but they were also a dangerous terrorist organization. The group reached its peak in this period numbering millions of members. African American travelers might encounter hooded Americans in almost every state. Why would members ride a ferris wheel wearing their robes and hoods? Klan disguises created solidarity among members of the group, increased their visibility, and intimidated others. 1926. Reproduced with permission of the Royal George Regional Museum and History Center, Cañon City, Colorado
Originally founded in 1866, in the aftermath of the Civil War, the Klan terrorized African Americans in the South and helped to institutionalize a system of intimidation and white supremacy that kept black citizens in a subservient position. In 1915, the organization gained new life and membership as a result of fears about immigration. Travelers in this period encountered Klan rallies, meetings, and social events throughout the country. Although the focus of their hatred never wavered, this second Klan also opposed Catholics, and Jews, as well as African Americans. The Klan ultimately gained considerable power and acceptance and elected some prominent political officials. In 1925, a large rally down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. gave the secretive group national visibility. Membership in the 1920s is believed to have reached four million. By the 1940s the number of African Americans lynched in the United States had diminished significantly. Two black men met death violently at the end of a mob’s rope in 1939 compared to 105 murdered by mob violence in 1901.32

Despite the lessening of lawlessness against African Americans, the Ku Klux Klan’s reputation for cruelty was ingrained in African American culture, and travelers feared having an experience like that of Joseph Holloway. One of the most memorable experiences in Joseph Holloway’s life happened at the age of nine. Holloway remembers striking out with his family in 1961 from their home in Los Angeles, California to visit his dying grandmother in Louisiana. Holloway’s Uncle Gus was driving a brand new Chrysler, but he did not know the roads very well and neither he nor his wife could read. He depended on young Joseph for help deciphering the confusing signs. Like most black

families on the road, the Holloways wanted to stay on the main highways, but they made a wrong turn somewhere near Waco, Texas. The family wound up in the middle of a town as it was getting dark and they were stunned to discover themselves in the midst of a lynching. The crowd lit the black victim on fire in a frenzy of racist zeal. The man’s screams and the smell of his burning flesh pierced the night. When the lynchers spotted the Holloway family’s car, they ran for their vehicles to catch these additional “niggers” and perhaps to add them to the pyre. Reversing direction, Uncle Gus floored the Chrysler and raced out of town. He saved the family by running with the headlights off and hiding for hours in a country lane as they heard police cars and the mob looking for them. As a testament to the fear that the near miss instilled in Holloway’s aunt, she immediately enrolled in reading classes when she returned to Los Angeles. She hoped to avoid another road mishap brought about by her inability to read road signs.33

Figure 3:8 African American drivers faced a variety of perils when they took to the road. In this 1956 photograph, a young white man, Billy Middlebrooks, tried to dissuade a mob that attempted to haul a black motorist passing through town from his car. African American drivers viewed automobiles as a protective environment, but sometimes even a powerful engine was not enough to get away. Courtesy, Farm Security Administration Photograph, Library of Congress
Figure 3:9 This highway sign at the entrance to Tuscaloosa, Alabama “welcomed” travelers to town in the 1960s. Such signs intimidated black motorists and reminded them that in the 1950s and 1960s many Americans perceived of the Ku Klux Klan as a respectable community organization rather than the supporters of and participants in numerous lynchings. Reproduced by Permission of Associated Press

Even those towns without “Welcome to Klan Country” signs may have had reputations as Klan towns. Black travelers needed no signs to identify such communities. Rumor, storytelling, and word-of-mouth passed Klan lore and offered advice about how to protect one’s family. Stories of the intimidation wrought by the Invisible Empire were shared within the black community. By passing on a tale, the storyteller believed that he or she was sharing valuable information that the untrustworthy mainstream media would not report.  

Throughout New Jersey in the 1920s and 1930s, angry men and women, often bringing their children, gathered periodically in dark cornfields to protest against African Americans, Jews, and Catholic immigrants in the state. In Pompton Plains, near Paterson, New Jersey, a group armed with clubs and pistols gathered in May 1923 to welcome new initiates. Driving their automobiles in a large, open square, headlamps blazing, the Klansmen lit a forty-foot cross, wrapped in burlap and soaked in accelerant, while the Grand Cyclops led the group in a straight-armed salute to the flag and a pledge to “maintain peace and harmony.” Earlier that same month 500 automobiles with white ribbons hung on their radiators to identify their owners as members of the Klan faithful went to New Brunswick to condemn race mixing. Thirteen crosses were burned on the lawns of houses and businesses in and around Newark that November. At the height of their popularity in the 1920s more than 60,000 people called themselves members of New Jersey’s Klan klaverns. Fiery crosses frightened residents and travelers throughout the state.35

By the 1940s there may have been no teeth to the threats made by the New Jersey Klan, but the rumors of Klan violence persisted. The Klan’s role in New Jersey consisted primarily of theatrical public displays rather than physical violence, but the group was

35 In the 1940s when the Klan’s association with the German-American Bund exposed their “Americanism” as dangerous to the war effort, membership dwindled and members drifted away. Although New Jersey’s Governor condemned the rallies and worked to put the Klan out of business, their popular appeal obviously touched a need and a fear among some of the state’s white residents, particularly before the war. The New York Times closely covered the activities of the Ku Klux Klan and its growth in New Jersey. See “12,000 of Klan Out at Jersey Meeting,” (May 3, 1923); “To Keep Names Secret,” (May 28, 1923), “Robed Riders Lead Public Klan Parade,” (June 23, 1923); “They Need Watching,” (August 20, 1940): 18; “Klan Outlawed in New Jersey,” (October 11, 1946).
well known for physical brutality. Vernell Allen observed that everyone in her Brooklyn community in the 1940s knew of New Jersey’s reputation as “a Klan state” and passed that information along to friends and travelers. When Vernell and her friends decided to drive to Atlantic City for a weekend in 1947 or 1948, they worried about stopping along the way and did so very cautiously. They carefully watched the faces of people when they stopped to identify potential dangers. The group was concerned because of rumors about the state that they would encounter dangerous characters.

When we went to Atlantic City we drove there. We got some fellows to drive us down. It was one of the girls’ boyfriends. They said to us, when we were driving out of Brooklyn—take food with you, water, whatever you want because we’re not going to stop in Jersey because it’s a Jim Crow state. . . . The Ku Klux Klan was in that area. . . . the KKKs. . . They didn’t want you stopping. They didn’t want to wait on you, and they would call you a nigger. We did have to stop. We found one place that looked sort of friendly. The guys had to get some gas or something. . . . We looked at the people’s faces. We scoped them out. Before we went into the store we looked the area over and looked the people over.36

The Invisible Empire’s bluster and legacy of brutality engendered wariness among black travelers even north of the Mason-Dixon line.

Figure 3:10 Vernell Allen’s friends snapped this shot during their trip to Atlantic City, New Jersey. Vernell and her friends traveled from Brooklyn to Atlantic City in the 1940s. The group feared traveling through New Jersey because of rumors about the Klan, but once they arrived they enjoyed the vibrant African American community in the resort town. Photograph, courtesy Vernell Allen
Businesses anxious to sell products brought a new form of advertising sign to the side of the road. Larger than life billboards used every second of automobile time to sell consumer goods. Some billboards proved particularly demeaning to black travelers. While the limited appearance of black Americans in advertising in the first seventy-five years of the twentieth century (with the exception of the black press) is well documented, in the context of the American roadside this exclusion contributed to the feeling of unease when driving into unfamiliar territory. The absence of black faces indicated the invisibility of African Americans in American life and their exclusion from the mainstream. Where African Americans were not excluded from billboards, road signs reflected the dominant culture’s negative attitudes about black people and supported notions of white superiority. Product messages along the highways, which all Americans drove on, expanded the reach of advertisers to broader audiences. Most billboards were located near city centers or near the entrance to population centers. To be clearly viewed by automobile passengers at highway speeds, billboards focused on large graphic images, not words, to sell products. Visual messages convinced viewers to buy detergent, beer, automobiles, cigarettes, or any number of other consumer goods. Words needed to be large and brief. The National Association of Manufacturers’ billboard captured by FSA photographer Margaret Bourke-White dramatically illustrates the difference between black and white lives during the first half of the twentieth century. The advertisement portrays an idealized American family—the Association’s version of the American dream. This perfect family includes a white, well dressed, smiling mother and father.

with two children and a dog (also white) all riding in the family automobile. This billboard was one in a series that also included a white family enjoying a picnic and a white family of homeowners replete with all of the essentials of successful American life—a house, a car, leisure time, and the ability to travel. The family is middle class, attractive, and well fed. They seem completely unaffected by the Depression. Below the happy group stands a sober line of real African American flood relief victims displaced in January, 1937 when the Ohio River rose and flooded Louisville, Kentucky. The larger than life billboard image defined automobile ownership as one of the joys and privileges of American family life, and proclaimed in a written message, “there’s no way like the American Way.” The American way encompassed the “world’s highest standard of living” depicted in family leisure travel.

Below the idealized sign the real African Americans queue for public assistance. The smiling mobile white family appeared unaffected by the local tragedy affecting the African Americans waiting patiently for Red Cross packages. Bourke-White’s photograph illustrates the clear differences, expressed in racial and economic terms, between the haves and the have-nots, and juxtaposes American ideals seen in advertisements featuring white Americans with black reality.
Figure 3:11 Margaret Bourke-White's famous photograph, *At the Time of the Louisville Flood*, illustrates the dichotomy between the idealized American life (“the world’s highest standard of living”) and the reality of African American life for many black citizens. 1937, Reproduced by permission Getty Images
The small number of billboards that included images of African Americans showed them in positions subservient to successful whites. They appear as counterpoints to one another—the white person of superior status, the black person of inferior status. Paired with an affluent middle class housewife, a smiling mammy sold Oxydol detergent. Wearing the characteristic head wrap and proudly lifting high a basket of freshly washed laundry, the mammy speaks deferentially to her “mistress” in southern dialect. “[Y]es ma’am, jes a little” Oxydol makes the clothes bright and clean, the mammy character says. The black woman assumed the role she had during slavery, pleasing the lady of the house and (from the white perspective) taking pride in doing work for the white household. The use of the black mammy on the billboard recreated a comforting world in which black and white people knew their places and gladly assumed them. For white Americans who no longer had servants, black mammies represented a social class lower than their own. White Americans appropriated the slave past to make themselves feel good. In another popular billboard, the barely dressed Gold Dust twins, the signature image for a brand of scouring powder and laundry detergent popular in the first quarter of the twentieth century, appeared as tiny African caricatures beside the larger-than-life Teddy Roosevelt arriving in America after a heroic safari. Uncle Sam greets Roosevelt in the advertisement for Gold Dust scouring powder. “Teddy Roosevelt scoured Africa, Let the Gold Dust twins scour America. Let the Gold Dust twins do your work,” proclaims the tag line. The coal black twins assume the role of servants, carrying Teddy Roosevelt’s suitcases while balancing boxes of Fairbanks’ Gold Dust washing powder on their heads. The billboard suggests that even without “help” any household could put these little African savages to work. Billboards fortified separation and segregation by
never placing white Americans and African Americans in positions as co-workers and by never depicting black people as consumers. Manufacturers and business owners feared that white buyers would not purchase their products or use their services if black models appeared in their advertising. Smiling back at white travelers, the African American stereotypes in these billboards assured viewers that black people not only held deferential roles in the society but also were contented to do so.

Black marketers informed white advertisers that black people were offended by these negative depictions. “Negroes don’t like to be labeled as a race specializing in a huge consumption of chicken, gin, pork chops, or watermelons. Many of them don’t like any of the four—just as many whites don’t like them.” Nevertheless, restaurants and other businesses throughout the country used these stereotypes on highway signs, billboards, and restaurant signs to entice diners with the promise of good food and ante-bellum hospitality. Some white Americans enjoyed participating in an imaginary world in which black people assumed the roles of slaves and recreated the old South. For African American travelers such racist establishments contributed to the hostile environment. The “nationally famous” Coon Chicken Inn, a restaurant founded in Salt Lake City in the 1920s, grew into a chain of west coast restaurants. Operating well into the 1950s, the eatery’s logo consisted of the large bald head of a grotesquely caricatured African

---

38 A variety of articles in the popular media argued that if African Americans were admitted to white establishments or were used in advertising whites would be discouraged from using the products or services. A questionnaire mailed to resorts across the country noted that responses “very often” included a notation that “I don’t mind personally, but if we accepted Negro guests it would have an unfavorable reaction on our business.” See for example, “Vacations Across the Color Line,” The Saturday Review (1950): 40-41.

39 David J. Sullivan, Don’t do This—if you Want to Sell Your Products to Negroes! Sales Management, 52, 1 (March, 1943) 50.
American man with swollen red lips and a round bellhop hat. The grinning, comic “coon” winks at restaurant patrons suggesting a shared joke. Diners entered the restaurant through the huge, toothy mouth, an idea that the founder, Maxon Lester Graham, thought would delight and attract children. The bellhop hat, a symbol of a menial job, matched the red lips in color and made the character look even more subservient. The menu featured “coon chicken and coon fried steak” among other “coon” dishes. The restaurant’s owner claimed that he did not see the caricature as offensive or insulting, or even as a racial stereotype. Graham preferred to hire African Americans as waiters, waitresses, and cooks whenever possible to reinforce the feeling of southern authenticity.

African American motorists faced a visual assault from such logos as the giant grinning “coon” in the bellhop hat as they traveled along the highway. This chain of restaurants operated from the 1920s to the 1950s. Collection of the author

Similarly, the dining room at the Lake Shore Plantation Inn in Lake Wales, Florida hired black waiters and waitresses and dressed them in eighteenth century servants’ costumes to provide their customers with the feeling of being transported back to the old South. “[T]he Inn radiates contentment and hospitality,” noted the description on the back of the picture postcard. Like actors on a stage, the workers in these establishments recreated slave roles to bolster the self-importance of white diners.
Establishments like the Plantation Inn reinforced the idea that the proper role of African Americans was to serve white Americans.

![Image of the Plantation Inn](image)

**Figure 3:13** The picture postcard for the Plantation Inn shows African American waiters and a waitress dressed as slaves to recreate the old South. Diners could take on the romantic and imaginary roles of masters and mistresses for the evening as they dined in ante-bellum grandeur. Collection of the author

The traveling public also had the opportunity to visit Sambo’s restaurants. The original Sambo’s fast food chain opened in Santa Barbara, California in 1957. Its founders combined their names, Sam Battistone and Newall Bohnett, nicknamed Bo, to create the name Sambo’s. Their choice of the children’s book, *Little Black Sambo*, to create a theme for their business fanned the outrage of the black community in the 1960s and 1970s. At the height of its popularity more than 1200 Sambo’s franchises opened across the country. They provided constant reminders, in the eyes of the African American public, that white Americans thought African Americans were perpetual and
helpless children. Hundreds of individually owned restaurants and other private businesses used similar stereotypes of contented Aunt Jemimas, compliant Uncle Toms, and grinning minstrel show caricatures to name their establishments and sell their products. Dozens of family restaurants used the image of the mammy to hawk food to travelers. The children’s menu for the popular Mammy’s Shanty restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia, for example, featured an Aunt Jemima-like character ringing the dinner bell beside a dilapidated slave cabin. In the foreground a watermelon-eating black child reminded visitors of the fine cooking of the southern slave mammy and the gracious living of the plantation. Mammy’s Shanty’s “Picaninny coffeeshop” exploited the popular stereotype of the feckless black child who lacked purpose and ambition. Such popular products as Chocolate Eyes milk beverages, Two Coons Axle Grease, and Pickaninny Freeze ice cream made in the 1940s by Hendler’s, a successful Baltimore company, used shabby, coal black children for comic purposes in advertisements that presented the natural inferiority of the black child from birth.41

The south held no monopoly on the use of the slave mammy stereotype as representative of gracious living and good eating. Topsy’s Restaurant in Baldwin, Long Island expanded to three home-style eateries specializing in chicken. Popular in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Topsy’s Plantation used an image of a young and stereotypically overweight black mammy in an apron and headscarf. Named for Topsy, the wild slave child character in Harriett Beecher Stowe’s novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the

restaurant’s tag line, “eat with your fingers,” informed diners that their usual middle-class manners could be suspended when eating in this “Negro inspired” establishment. Topsy, the restaurant’s mascot, has grown up and her unkempt pigtails have been tamed with a headscarf.

The PickaRib rib joint used a cartoon-like black chef to sell its main attraction—spare ribs. The stereotype of the African American as cook and as servant was common to all of these restaurants. “The very name ‘Southern Cooking’ seems to conjure up the vision of the old mammy, head tied with a red bandana, a jovial, stoutish, wholesome personage. . .a wizard in the art of creating savory, appetizing dishes from plain everyday ingredients,” claimed a souvenir cookbook from Fredericksburg, Virginia. African Americans despised the underlying message of these stereotypes—the association of black people with chicken, pork, good southern cooking, and good service to white people. “Don’t picture colored women as buxom, broad-faced, grinning mammys and Aunt Jemimas. Negroes have no monopoly on size,” noted Negro market consultant, David Sullivan, the most well-known African American market researcher in the 1940s. “Neither are they all laundresses, cooks and domestic servants.”

43 Sullivan, *Don’t do This—if you Want to Sell Your Products to Negroes!* 50.
Figure 3:14 Topsy's Restaurant, with a young mammy figure as its symbol, represented several establishments in New York State. Similar eateries throughout the country used stereotypes of black slave women as their logos. Such images helped to reaffirm the place of African Americans in American culture. Black travelers constantly encountered these negative images. Topsy was the wild slave child “friend” of the angelic little Eva in the Civil War era novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Here she has grown up to be a providing mammy. Collection of the author
Black travelers also encountered dozens of products bearing stereotypical images of black people—pickaninny chocolates, black Sambo candy, and Nigger Hair tobacco among others. Vacationers in search of souvenir postcards discovered images of black children being eaten by alligators or feasting on watermelons beside standard views of Atlantic City or the Washington Monument.

Figure 3:15 The black child in this postcard exemplifies the comic picaninny. With wide-eyes and big lips, the World War II era image looks somewhat like an animal with few hairs and a naked bottom. Blackouts were common civil defense measures during this period. The joke is that the blackout refers to the child and the air raid to the gas emanating from the bare behind. Collection of the author
Souvenir and postcard stands along the road reflected the popularity of bringing a little bit of your vacation home, but many of the souvenirs assaulted black travelers with trinkets and keepsakes that bore no particular relationship to the places visited and were adorned with “amusing” black caricatures. Race-based souvenirs reinforced the inferiority of the nation’s black citizens. The images symbolizing the state of Alabama on a 1950s souvenir glass showed the state’s cities and a black woman bent over her bag of cotton in the field. Tennessee’s souvenir glass depicted a black man lifting a bag of cotton. Like his counterpart from Alabama, this black figure represented African Americans as a rural people engaged in a task associated with slavery. A souvenir ashtray of the Thousand Islands, on the border between New York State and Canada, featured a tiny black baby seated on a chamber pot labeled “ashes.” Even as the black middle class grew and asserted their claim on the American dream, the negative images of black people persisted. Racist souvenirs created a myth of rural black life, reinforced the supremacy of white people, and denied the existence of the black middle class. Many black stereotypes harkened back to the “good old days” of slavery or share cropping when roles were clearly defined and black people knew their place in the social order. Such images horrified black people, but comforted whites by reinforcing their superiority. White Americans could progress in the twentieth century, while black Americans were stuck, as slaves, in the mythical neverland of the idyllic (for whites) southern plantation life.

While scanning postcard racks for scenes of Atlantic City or Washington, D.C. some African American travelers would have encountered post cards that glorified
lynching. Between the 1890s and 1930s amateur photographers produced numerous images of the mob murder of black people. By 1908 Congress passed a law that prohibited sending lynching postcards through the mail, but the objects sold openly in shops as collectors’ items. A few lynching postcards continued in circulation into the 1960s along with souvenir bits of nooses and sometimes small pieces of the victims’ bodies. Sometimes civil rights organizations challenged the sale of these macabre souvenirs as the NAACP did the photographs of the lynching murder of Abe Smith and Thomas Shipp in 1930.\textsuperscript{44} Despite the decrease in lynchings by the mid-twentieth century, these postcards struck fear into the hearts of the black traveling public; they illustrated the potential lawlessness in many parts of the country. Some cards included “amusing” racist doggerel. Most showed the smiling lynchers posing with the lynched as if the victim were a recently shot eight-point buck. The messages on these cards could be more chilling than the photographs. Many marked the spot where the sender stood to watch the lynching or callously informed the reader of the pain and suffering inflicted on the victim (“This was the barbecue we had last night.”). Lynching postcards brutalized and dehumanized black people and added to the hostility of the highway. In addition to finding the postcards on souvenir racks these objects were often framed and posted in public places or displayed proudly with body parts harvested from the victim.\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
Preserved in jars of formaldehyde or alcohol or perhaps dried like summer fruit lynchers exhibited fingers, toes, teeth, and even penises in store windows as macabre keepsakes. These objects served both to alarm African Americans who might see them and to solidify the exhibitor’s ideas about white supremacy. Celebrating vigilante violence, these displays of human flesh demonstrated that lynchers could practice their craft with impunity. They boldly displayed criminal evidence in store windows without fear of law enforcement. W.E.B. DuBois remembered the case of Sam Hose, a black man in Georgia who killed his landlord’s wife. After the local citizens lynched him Hose’s knuckles were displayed baking in the heat of a grocery store window. Lynching postcards were a reminder that given the nation’s racial problems, at any time an African American traveler might inadvertently encounter a deadly situation.46

Figure 3:16 Spectators at a lynching in Duluth, Minnesota were photographed, for this postcard, with the victims. The murdered men were accused of raping a white woman. As the crowd yelled, “To hell with the law!” the men were dragged from their cells. This postcard and a pamphlet commemorated the event. The popularity of these macabre souvenirs was one reason that African Americans found the highways frightening and dangerous places. 1920, Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Some law enforcement officers were among those who ignored violence against African Americans on the road. When a melee broke out in Detroit in 1943, fueled by white rioters angry with black citizens, it touched off dozens of street fights. White mobs burned cars belonging to blacks. The white officers charged with stopping the riots either ignored the white rioters or joined in attacks on African American citizens. By the end
of the episode the police had shot and killed seventeen residents, all of them black.⁴⁷
Such episodes were repeated all over the country, “Before the 1960s, you definitely stayed out of their way,” noted Sylvester Hollis, who grew up in Alabama, of policemen. “They were rough when they talked to you. They called you boy.” Once you went into the justice system law enforcement officers could do whatever they wished. They would arrest you and once you were arrested other things would happen. They would kill you.”⁴⁸ The visual imagery of the roadside slammed black American travelers with messages that constantly and consistently reinforced notions of inferiority, second-class citizenship, and physical vulnerability.

As historian M.M. Manring notes, twentieth century advertising focused on Americans’ ideas about identity and on self-images. The myth of the plantation south symbolized leisure and elegance for white Americans. The plantation myth allowed twentieth century whites to identify themselves as paternal and benevolent slave owners.⁴⁹ As blacks moved into the middle class and as they pushed to destroy the barriers of segregation, whites found solace in the idealized antebellum lifestyle where contented Negroes were always servants, cooks, or pickaninnies. For African Americans on the road, encounters with the plantation myth added to the landscape of inferiority and intimidation. White Americans found contentment in nostalgia and their vision of the past, but African Americans looked to the future and the steady improvement of their social and economic circumstances.

---

Figure 3:17 African-American travelers faced an onslaught of distorted images in souvenirs and travel keepsakes. Shown here are a tar baby fishing lure from Florida, a souvenir glass from Alabama featuring a black woman picking cotton, a ceramic memento from the Thousand Islands of a black child sitting on a toilet and a cookbook and souvenir mirror with mammy stereotypes. Collection of the author

Tar babies, Aunt Jemimas, and other similar stereotypes repeated on signs souvenirs, postcards, food products and advertisements throughout the nation meant that a black family on the road could encounter continuous negative stereotypes.

The American landscape changed between the 1920s and 1960s. For white American travelers the roadside created by the modern highway system—and as seen from a car— was “remote, standardized, uninteresting, and unrewarding….,” but
generally safe. For African Americans, the American roadside was both physically and metaphorically, an uncharted territory for which they had no map and no way to navigate the social obstacles hidden within the private spaces they encountered along public highways. For the traveling black public the environment they found as they ventured out in their automobiles was inconsistent, unpredictable, humiliating, and hostile. Even in states outside the south, racism and intimidation scarred the motoring landscape for black drivers. “Everyday you realized you were in an environment where your life was not of value,” remembered Sylvester Hollis. Families and business travelers responded by planning ahead, bringing plenty of supplies, gathering word of mouth recommendations, recreating a safe place inside their automobiles, and carefully and thoughtfully choosing places to stop along way.

Before leaving on a trip, most black families collected information from a variety of sources including the black press, from specially focused travel guides and maps, and from word-of-mouth recommendations. The printed materials provided cultural maps to unfamiliar places. A series of handbooks and guides for the road that catered to the specific needs of the black traveling public offered clues to help black travelers navigate the country safely and without embarrassment. As the Negro Motorist’s Green Books reminded readers, the guides offered “assured protection for the Negro traveler.”

50 Jackle, p. xiii
Chapter Four

Travel Books For Everyone?

“The white traveler for years has had no difficulty in getting accommodations, but with the Negro it has been different”

“Prior to 1945, the number of hotels, restaurants, motels and such establishments that solicited or welcomed Negro patronage outside the south was infinitesimal,” reported George Schuyler in the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Citing a survey of 2,500 citizens developed by the Washington D.C. firm Andrew F. Jackson and Associates, Schuyler reported that Negro travelers were welcome “in not more than 6 per cent [sic] of the nation’s better hotels and motels.”1 “There are probably fewer than twenty cities in the country where Negroes are not completely barred from white-owned restaurants,” wrote Schuyler in another article about public accommodations in both the North and the South. “Refusal is usually bold and callous; even where civil-rights laws exist, restaurant owners know that custom is with them.” The welcome that African American travelers received at hotels and restaurants was mirrored at beaches, amusement parks, theaters, swimming pools, bowling alleys, and other places of public entertainment.2 In the 1940s, when the first generation of black corporate executives traveled, of necessity, for their jobs and black families took to the road for vacations in the 1950s, they expected and could afford the same types of business and luxury accommodations sought by other middle class travelers. But there were far fewer black hotels and guesthouses for black travelers to choose from across the country. The reputations of African American luxury hotels like the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, the Majestic Hotel in Cleveland, or Detroit’s Carlton Plaza

---

were well known to black travelers both for their fine guest rooms and their evening
entertainment. At the other end of the spectrum, small guesthouses like Rock Rest in
Kittery, Maine, or the modest hotel at the Idlewild resort in Michigan hosted repeat
guests every summer because of their relaxed atmospheres and cordial service.³ While
each individually owned hotel had its own character, before the age of hotel chains
travelers found tourist accommodations of inconsistent quality. “I was lucky to find a
Negro hotel at all,” lamented Saunders Redding of his trip to Charleston.

This one smelled of damp... The brass was peeling from the bed. A washstand in
the corner was fastened upright to the wall with wire. The shattered mirror in the
bureau cast a thousand twisting images. At the window a dirty rag of lace, yellow
from rain, served for curtain. ‘Two dollars,’ the man said and held out his hand. . .
‘And for a week,’? I asked. ‘A week?’ he hesitated. ‘Two dollars a night just the
same’. . . We ain’t got bellboys neither.⁴

The room was so unpleasant that Redding suspended his possessions from a pipe running
across the ceiling and covered the thin, filthy and stained mattress with newspapers. He
slept with the light on to ward off the bedbugs and noted with disgust the prostitute who
came knocking at the door in the middle of the night looking for a match.⁵ Without the
recommendations of friends or guidebooks travelers’ experiences could be hit or miss.
Historian Susan Rugh argues that prosperous African Americans found black owned
hotels to be second-rate, and they wanted to stay in higher-quality white-owned lodging.⁶

The situation is more nuanced. Middle class African Americans did not necessarily
desire to stay in white-owned lodgings. They were torn. Segregated lodgings by their

³Sondra K. Wilson, Meet Me At the Theresa: the Story of Harlem's Most Famous Hotel (New
York: Atria Books, 2004); "Cleveland's New Majestic Hotel," The Negro Traveler (July/August,
1948); “Finest Negro Hotel: Detroit's Carletton Plaza." Ebony 5, (1950): 81-86; John Fraser Hart,
⁵Ibid 97.
very nature were second-class, but not always second rate. Opening segregated lodgings owned by whites to black customers meant ending segregation. On the other hand, black travelers wanted to support black-owned businesses and while on vacation they wanted to feel comfortable and free of stress. To avoid stress they found black-owned lodgings desirable. Among black owned hotels and guesthouses black travelers found accommodations ranging from luxury to deplorable. Planning was key for black travelers to insure their ability to find appropriate places to stay. “The Happy Traveler is a Planner,” travel writer Valena Minor reminded her readers in the *Negro Traveler* Magazine.

African American travel guides encouraged black motorists to use road maps in tandem with an African American travel guidebook as the perfect companions to plan a car trip. “In planning your trip or tour, secure a road map from your local service station for the trip that you expect to take,” advised the Green Book. “Plan your trip from this map, noting the route and cities that you are to pass through, then you can make note of the accommodations in the cities that you are to pass through in case you might want to stop over.”

Black travelers needed clear and confirmed accommodations secured in advance and they needed specialized travel guides to avoid such unpleasant situations. “The White

---

8 Valena Elizabeth Minor, "The Happy Traveler is a Planner," *The Negro Traveler* 1 No. 6 (1945): 20.  
traveler for years has had no difficulty in getting accommodations, but with the Negro it has been different,” wrote Victor Green, author of the *Negro Motorist Green Book*. “He, before the advent of a Negro travel guide, had to depend on word of mouth, and many times accommodations were not available. Now things are different.” The Negro traveler can depend on the ‘GREEN BOOK’ for all the information he wants, and has a wide selection to choose from.”¹⁰ For African Americans, specialized travel guides made it possible to plan trips by identifying welcoming establishments, resorts, and places of entertainment, as well as black business establishments anywhere in the country.¹¹

With the growth of the automobile industry and the constantly changing network of roads dozens of travel publications—brochures, books, journals, guides, and travel maps—helped the flood of vacationers negotiate the country’s roads and learn about the natural and man-made attractions they might visit. This chapter examines these general travel books written ostensibly for all Americans, but because of the segregated

---


¹¹ A wide variety of guidebooks were published between 1930 and the 1960s to meet the growing number of middle class African American tourists and business executives. Guides specifically for black travelers include *Harrison’s Hotel and Apartment Guide for Colored Travelers*, [1930-31]; *The Negro Motorist Green Book* and *Negro Travelers’ Green Book*, [1936-1966]; *Smith’s Tourist Guide of Necessary Information for Businessman, Tourist, Traveler and Vacationist*, [1940]; *The Negro Travel Guide*, which was unusual because of its large celebrity photographs and focus on African American night clubs and performance spaces) [1948]; *The Go Guide to Pleasant Motoring*, [1952-1959]; *The Bronze American* [unknown dates]; *Travelguide*, [1947-1963]; *Nationwide Hotel Association Directory and Guide to Travel*, [1959]. The dates listed indicate extant copies located during the course of this research project, but additional issues may originally have been published. A travel guide specifically for Pullman Porters and other African American train workers was published in Chicago in the 1940s. The first volume of *The Negro Traveler* was issued in December, 1944. [1944-1950?]. Other guides, such as *Grayson’s Travel and Business Guide, circa 1937* were advertised in newspapers and magazines but no extant copies could be found. Travel sections in popular magazines like *Ebony* and newspapers like the *Baltimore Afro-American* also provided details on places to stay and recommended hospitable destinations. The Baltimore Afro-American issued the Afro Travel Map in 1942.
underpinnings of the nation, really only for white Americans. Some of these travel publications were literary, others commercial. Commercial messages embedded in travel brochures met the advertising needs of corporations spawned by the tourism industry. For-profit enterprises—bus companies, oil companies, hotels, and resorts—created and circulated tourist information and maps as promotional tools to attract consumers to a particular brand of gasoline, or to encourage booking a room at a specific resort hotel. Travel became a commodity to be consumed not only for the good of the individual, but also for the good of the nation. Travel put dollars into the economy and at the same time promoted patriotism and citizenship through visits to historic places, and encouraged Americans to see the beauty in their country and to spend their money to see it, and to celebrate it.\textsuperscript{12}

In the 1930s the market for literary travel books in the United States exploded. Claudia Cranston, a travel writer for \textit{Publishers Weekly}, found evidence in 1936 of what she called the end of Depression travel inertia. She noted—a spike in steamship line bookings and a dramatic increase in the number of travel books, booklets, and travel magazines being published and purchased. Brentano’s, one of New York’s largest bookstores, anecdotally reported that travel book sales jumped “somewhere between 50% and 100%” in the mid-1930s, and Cranston reported seeing customers fighting over the travel books at Macy’s during the Christmas rush.\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{New York Times}, perhaps a


more consistent indicator of reading habits, regularly listed reviews of the numerous
tavel books and guides on the market.\textsuperscript{14}

The popularity of Depression era travel books may have been, to some extent, the
result of the opportunity to “see” and enjoy other places from one’s armchair—to escape
hard times. Readers vicariously traveled to exotic locations when they could not afford
real vacations. An article in the \textit{New York Times} noted, “As everyone knows almost all
good travel books can be read in two ways: for quiet enjoyment amid the static comforts
of home—escape literature; or for suggestions, which may or may not take the form of
practical usefulness for personal travel of your own—pursuit in a peculiar but literal
sense.”\textsuperscript{15} Among the long lists of travel books available in the 1930s, the most popular
served as light entertainment and could be read like novels.\textsuperscript{16} More like journals, these
books offered personal reflections based on meanderings through the American
countryside or overseas by car, train, or plane. Other travel narratives with alluring titles
like \textit{Romantic and Historic Florida} and \textit{Trailing Cortez Through Mexico} (both published
in 1935) transported readers to distant and wondrous places that they would probably

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In the 1930s and after \textit{The New York Times} regularly reviewed the large number of travel
books. Some of the books discussed domestic travel by car and train, such as Diana Rice
"Random Notes for Travelers: Series of Auto Tours of This Area Arranged for Visitors." \textit{New
November 26, 2008). Other books transported readers to more exotic places such as Katherine
Woods, "In the South Sea Islands Known as ‘Dark’”; John W. Vandercook’s \textit{Voyaging in Fiji, 
\item Katherine Woods. "All Aboard That’s Going Abroad: Nine New Books of Travel That Will
Take You to England and the Continent, Persia, Yugoslavia and the Caribbean.” \textit{New York Times
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
never visit. These books provided vicarious delights and whisked weary Americans away from economic deprivation.

Baedeker’s, the old standby of mass-produced guidebooks earned its reputation in nineteenth century Europe. The American Baedeker, first published in 1893, like its parent publication suited travelers making their way around large, old city centers with detailed street maps and descriptions. In the face of a constantly changing network of highways and expanding suburbs the rarely reprinted Baedeker’s became rapidly out of date. Motorists needed current route numbers, street signs, and markers to successfully reach their destinations. While Baedeker’s was a well-known “mine of information” about timeless tourist sites like the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Capital of the United States, the book was sold chiefly to foreign tourists—“those who visited us from across the water,” as one literary source commented, and knew of the book’s usefulness in Europe.17 As a guide to roads and highways the 1909 edition of Baedeker’s printed “before the Big War” was as obsolete as “the Oregon Trail by the 1930s.” The expanse and diversity of the American continent made a single national guidebook quite difficult to produce in a manageable volume. “The size and complexity of the country have made difficult the production of an adequate one-volume guide for the United States as a whole,” wrote travel writer Elizabeth Platt in 1939.18 The wide variety of guides developed to meet this need shared one characteristic. More than simple manuals to places and highways, they assumed a particular cultural view about travelers and travel accommodations that helped readers find other people like themselves. Appealing to

18 Ibid.
middle class values, the books sold the luxury and comfort of prestigious hotels and accommodations and promoted leisure pursuits with people of similar backgrounds and interests who could travel anywhere in the country without hindrance. Middle class, white Americans could use guidebooks to select accommodations that met their standards for luxury and modernity and that excluded undesirable others. The vast majority of white Americans lived in all-white neighborhoods, and as they selected their vacation spots they sought places where they could recreate the comfort of their home neighborhoods while on the road. African Americans, Jews, and Indians offered colorful entertainment and exotic distractions in certain vacation destinations, but white Americans did not want these groups in the hotels and restaurants that comprised their homes away from home any more than they wanted them in their own homes. The pervasiveness of segregation demonstrates this point. Even in New York State, the Pittsburgh Courier’s George Schuyler found that at least “95 per cent” of privately owned accommodations, “do their best to keep out Negroes.”

Travel guides and brochures depicted a white, homogeneous view of the country. In most travel guides blacks and other minorities were generally invisible.

---

20 For example, The American Automobile Association’s circa 1950s brochure, “Travel Tips” depicts six vignettes of vacationers, all using white families engaged in middle class pasttimes including golf, sailing and swimming. Many state roadmaps use “typical” white tourist families as their cover illustrations to “sell” a vision of American travelers as alluring and sophisticated and travel as adventurous. The Osher Map Collection at the University of Southern Maine includes a large on-line exhibition of road map covers and travel brochures from across the country that informed this research. The archive can be accessed at http://www.usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/selling.html Accessed September 20, 2008. The American Automobile Association Blue Book offers a wealth of picture advertisements of travelers and accommodations. It was published annually from 1906. Automobile Blue Book. Chicago: Automobile Blue Book Pub. Co.
Mainstream travel books and guides also recreated an American landscape that reinforced negative attitudes and prejudices commonly held about black Americans, other people of color, and immigrants. In this world, African Americans often became specimens of folk culture who rendered the landscape more colorful—not tourists, but tourist attractions. Jan and Cora Gordon wrote a memoir of their car trip from Maine to Georgia. Throughout the narrative, readers met the “exotic” people the Gordon women met during their travels. Their perspective was that of sophisticated white anthropologists observing (in their view) simple indigenous peoples—Chinese, Germans, and Albanians—with quaint customs. They described foreign accents as speaking “in dialect.” Southern “Negroes” fascinated them. During a trip to the Sea Islands, off the coast of Georgia, the two women maternalistically focused on the role of white women in helping the black “natives” to test “their capacity for social development.” Revealing their conformity to the stereotype of black men as predators and rapists, the Gordons commiserated with Mrs. Puckett, a southern white woman, who feared that a black man on the island might attack her. “I tell you we white women hereabouts don’t dare go out alone at all,” Mrs. Pluckett complained, “even though we manage to keep them niggers in order by lynching one now and again.”


The Gordon women’s view of black Americans as strange or dangerous characters pervaded and defined white middle class travel accommodations prior to the 1960s. African Americans appeared almost exclusively as service providers.\footnote{Many brochures depict African Americans only as porters, bellhops, maids or chauffeurs. For example, a 1940 ad for the Plymouth automobile touting a “luxury ride” shows a well-dressed white family arriving at a hotel with their vacation bags being carried by a black bellhop who is greatly impressed with their car. A brochure for the Gilbert Hotels depicted a red suited Sambo caricature in a bellhop uniform smiling broadly with swollen pink lips to demonstrate the type of obsequious service the establishment provided. A variety of images of travel, hotel and restaurant brochures that include African Americans may be found in the John Margolies collection accessed on the web at http://www.johnmargolies.com/.
} Like performers on a living stage the presence of black Americans contributed to the luxury of hotels and resorts or the pastoral nature of the region. The historical roles of the faithful slave or unctuous servant were particularly popular as were seedy but colorful characters from the wrong side of town. African Americans were never depicted as citizens on an equal footing with whites. A 1929 article in \textit{Travel} Magazine described the “Happy-Go-Lucky” nature of Birmingham’s “sepia settlement.” The article portrayed the city’s black residents as idle, loud, and flamboyantly dressed. Hucksters, voodoo doctors, and trinket salesmen loitered in streets strewn with watermelon rinds. The lively street scene conjured a foreign place within the United States for white tourists looking for an exotic experience. Readers could immerse themselves in the tourist narrative. “The stroller who plunges into the dusky crowds on Saturday,” the magazine proposed, “is caught up in a carnival gaiety.”\footnote{Lucia Giddens, “The Happy-Go-Lucky Harlem of the South,” \textit{Travel} 53 (July 1929) 40-41.} Such depictions were exciting yet non-confrontational for whites—the antithesis of the disquieting confrontations going on across the country to end Jim Crow practices.
Other travel writers focused on historic sites and stories that reinforced the positive attributes of slavery in American history by singing the praises of the Confederacy or celebrating the owners of slaves. A travel guide to North Carolina proudly informed visitors that the state contributed more “heavily in men to the Confederate armies than any other.” After the occupation of the capitol by General Sherman and the end of the War, the “State went through a disastrous period called ‘Reconstruction.’”

This “disastrous period” included temporary military occupation by African American troops and passage of the fourteenth amendment giving full citizenship to the newly freed slaves. Another guide written by the American Automobile Association (AAA) encouraged tourists to visit the Hermitage in Tennessee to see the home of the former President and Mrs. Jackson, to visit their tombs, and see the grave of “faithful Uncle Alfred” buried near them in the garden.

The 1937 Southeastern Travel Guide, one of the AAA’s regional paperbacks, demonstrates the limited value of such guides to black travelers. Although describing itself as “unbiased because we favor no individual system of travel, no special territory, no distinct mediums,” the book reflected a bias of omission where African Americans were concerned. Written for New Yorkers visiting Washington, D.C. and the southern states, the Southeastern Guide’s territory included the popular route for black migrants returning to visit families in the South. The book rarely made mention of African Americans, except as members of a separate underclass who happened to inhabit the region. Like most publications, particularly those written for northerners and for broad

24 North Carolina, the Tar Heel State, Raleigh, North Carolina, Department of Conservation and Development, c.1950.
public distribution, overt Jim Crow language did not appear because it was clearly recognized as not only insulting but also antithetical to the positive national image of unity that tourism brochures hoped to put forward. In a country that prided itself on its democracy, slavery and segregation were distasteful topics for middle class American vacation consumers anxious to have a good time and to celebrate the greatness of the United States. The preferred tourist attractions, the battlefields of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and the homes of American heroes, fit more comfortably into the national mythology. With the exception of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial School in Alabama, described as “a coeducational school founded and conducted for negroes by negroes,” sites related to African Americans were missing from the travel guide. The Washington, D.C. home of abolitionist Frederick Douglas, for example, a popular site for middle class black tourists, does not appear in the guide. Clues to the way that black travelers must have viewed the AAA’s Southeastern travel guide may be drawn from the tenor of the publication. In telling the story of Mississippi, for example, the guide noted the return of white supremacy “finally” after the unpleasantness of Reconstruction.

“[T]he enfranchisement of the negroes, under the leadership of white republicans and the election of many of them to important state offices,” the author commented, “caused years of conflict and bitterness.” The book matter-of-factly condoned voting restrictions. “The racial problem remained acute until 1890, when suffrage was restricted to those who could read a section of the Constitution or interpret a section if read aloud, as this effectively returned political government to the white race.”

---

26 AAA Southeastern Travel Guide, 164.
The most important failing of the *Southeastern Guide* from the perspective of potential black readers were the hotel listings. They included no statements about racial exclusion or inclusion, making them useless to African Americans traveling in Jim Crow America. References to race were omitted even though race determined where travelers could stay, where they could purchase gas, and where they could eat meals. African American travelers would have found such books totally useless.

Travel maps more subtly reflected attitudes toward black Americans. While the maps themselves were race neutral, the cover illustrations defined the ideal American motorist and the ideal traveling American family. For those uninterested in purchasing the narrative travel guides, the oil companies, anxious to attract business to their gas stations and to create brand loyalty, distributed maps free of charge to motorists. Many of these maps had appealing, full color, artist-rendered covers. White, well dressed, modern, and middle-class couples and nuclear white families smiled out at travelers from gas station map racks. From the 1920s through the 1960s the covers of oil company maps, like other aspects of American visual culture, demonstrated the invisibility of African Americans and their undesirability both as full citizens and as tourists.

Until the 1970s map cover art, like other forms of advertising, generally did not include flattering or even neutral likenesses of black people. A 1929 New Jersey map made by Standard Oil depicts a successful white couple driving a sporty roadster with multiple suitcases strapped to the side. The vacationing couple has stopped at the top of a hill to enjoy the scenery. The picture, like the narrative guides of the 1920s and 1930s
touts the beauty and wide-open spaces that the country has to offer, and the scene suggests to the viewer that they too can enjoy this type of travel. Conoco’s state maps similarly featured an idealized American traveling family with two white parents, one boy, one girl, and an automobile. Some oil companies used images of helpful and competent gas station attendants on map covers, smiling and assisting with automobile maintenance duties. Esso represented the pinnacle of service with an image of a spotless, bow-tied attendant giving directions to an attractive, blonde middle-aged couple. Although the maps included no narrative descriptions about travel destinations, the pictures offer clearly discernable messages about who mattered and who did not matter in American society. Standard Oil chose a blonde young woman in a convertible asking for directions. Black people, nearly invisible on map cover art, appear only as a picturesque part of the landscape. A map of Arkansas for the Louisiana Oil Refining Corporation depicted the standard southern stereotype of blacks working in the cotton fields. They are sharecroppers, but they might as well be slaves. The sight seemed “natural” to whites. For visitors to the state, the map’s visual message was that African Americans were not tourists, but attractions.
Figure 4:1 This 1929 Standard Oil Road Map of New Jersey illustrates the ideal American couple—white, attractive, and middle-class. Reproduced courtesy of the Osher Map Collection, Smith Center for Cartographic Education, University of Southern Maine
Figure 4:2 Maps offered travelers visual messages about race. In the map of Arkansas on the left, African Americans were tourist attractions and a part of the scenery. The image reminds viewers of an idealized slave past. In contrast, the young woman on the Standard Oil map of Nebraska is a modern traveler, a consumer of the landscape rather than a part of it. Reproduced courtesy of the Osher Map Collection, Smith Center for Cartographic Education, University of Southern Maine.

The federal government’s promotion of tourism illustrates both the split in the country between black and white Americans and the federal desire to please multiple constituencies. The Department of the Interior waded into the automobile travel guide
business with *Travel USA*, a publication designed to boost the economy during the Depression. The office of the United States Tourist Bureau, a little known program of the New Deal, used *Travel USA* to encourage Americans to travel, to see the country, and to increase their spending.\(^{27}\) During the brief run of the magazine its writers never mentioned the segregated accommodations that black travelers depended upon when they traveled, nor did they offer suggestions for black travel agents on negotiating the perils of travel for black Americans. The United States Travel Bureau was involved in African American tourism, however. Recognizing the growing black middle class whose disposable income and interest in travel could help to meet the goal of stimulating the economy, the Tourist Bureau created lists of segregated Negro hotels and guesthouses for travelers. These “Negro guides” were simple listings of a relatively small number of segregated hotels, guesthouses, and YMCAs. These lists indicate some government sensitivity of the plight of black Americans, and at the same time the limitations of that sensitivity. The Travel Bureau also circulated Victor Green’s *Negro Motorist Green Book* to outlets across the country, a contributing factor in his success. The existence of the Travel Bureau’s hotel listings and distribution of the *Green Book* indicate the federal government’s recognition of the need to assist black travelers in a segregated country.

While organizations like the United States Tourist Bureau promoted travel in the United

\(^{27}\) In addition to domestic tourists, the United States Travel Bureau sought to attract foreign travelers to visit the United States. The agency operated from 1937, suspended operation from 1942 to 1947, because of severe restrictions on travel resulting from World War II, and then resumed operation briefly. *Travel USA Bulletin*, a slick magazine designed primarily for travel agents and distributed free of charge, was published from 1948 to 1949. The magazine included brief articles encouraging travel to “Colorful Colorado,” or extolling the virtues of Colonial Williamsburg. Articles offered recommendations on how to determine the weather before a trip or describing the construction of new or rehabilitated highways.
States as a universal experience that unified all Americans, they were well aware of the
pervasiveness of segregation and the country’s racial divisions.\textsuperscript{28}

Another New Deal program developed long lasting travel guides that attempted, although with limited success, to bridge the racial divide. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) state guidebooks called \textit{The American Guide Series} — similar to an American Baedeker — had far loftier goals for readers than other travelers’ handbooks.\textsuperscript{29} Not merely travel guides, these books—one for each state—had political and social purposes. The production of the books put people back to work, but as historian Christine Bold has emphasized, they also attempted to create a unified vision of the nation, reinforcing a national and shared identity. The WPA Guides mapped a cultural landscape ravaged by suffering and economic collapse and constructed a popular image of the United States that was ordered and patriotic. Written and priced to appeal to the middle class, the guides provided a way of understanding and visiting America that illustrated the unique aspects of the geography and history of each place, at the same time highlighting the shared American experience.\textsuperscript{30} Each narrative included accounts of the largest cities, sections on the history, geology, art, and architecture of the region, descriptions of important sites, and a route guide for automobile access to the

\textsuperscript{28} The United States Tourist Bureau collection is in the library of Case Western Reserve University and may be accessed online at /library.case.edu/ksl/govdocs/travel/about.html accessed August 1, 2007.
\textsuperscript{30} Christine Bold, \textit{The WPA Guides; Mapping America} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999) 3-18.
state. As Americans sought to know their country, the WPA guides offered modern, if bureaucratic support of an increasingly important national commodity—tourism.\(^{31}\)

Some of the guides included independent sections on black life, reflecting the separateness felt by African Americans. The WPA Guide to 1930s New Jersey, for example, described Negroes and foreign-born whites as members of colorful, one-dimensional folk cultures apart from the mainstream. The Germans and Poles appeared as a musical people, who enjoyed singing societies and orchestras. New Jersey’s Italian immigrants cultivated peppers, artichokes, and eggplants. The state’s Negroes were classified as apathetic and impoverished. As non-whites, African Americans were particularly degraded in some of the volumes. The people of Gouldtown, a southern New Jersey community of mixed race, came in for considerable derision because of their race mixing and their refusal to accept Negro status. The guide indignantly indicated that they could not be classed as whites.\(^{32}\) African Americans in these guides were given the opportunity to be a part of the experience of travel, but as members of the servant class supporting the travel experiences of others. Ignoring Atlantic City’s vibrant black community and nightlife, for example, the New Jersey guide focused on the role of African Americans in service to white tourists. The guide noted that the boardwalk in Atlantic City, New Jersey was populated with a “procession in rolling chairs propelled mostly by Negroes who are not paid for waiting time but only for every hour they

\(^{31}\) Ibid

push.” 33 Black neighborhoods in the seaside city similarly set black people apart from the white middle class traveling public. “North of Atlantic Avenue the city deteriorates into a dingy section,” the guide warned, “somewhat improved by recent slum clearance and street repairing. This is the North side home of Atlantic City’s Negro inhabitants—23 percent of the total population and, next to that of Newark, the most important Negro population of the State. They form a reservoir of cheap labor for the hotels, amusement piers, restaurants, riding academies, and private homes.” 34 The writers of the New Jersey Guide were unaware of or chose to ignore the hundreds of middle class black tourists who visited Atlantic City’s guesthouses, tourist homes, and popular, segregated “Chicken Bone” beach each year.

33 Ibid., 192.
34 Ibid., 193.
In an attempt to recognize African Americans as an important part of American cultural life Henry Alsberg, the national editor of the series, hired poet and Howard University English professor Sterling Brown as the National Negro Affairs editor to develop sections about African American life for the state guides. African Americans received little mention in the first guides to be released, which sparked some criticism. Novelists Ralph Ellison and Claude McKay, and novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, were among the approximately thirty writers Brown hired.\(^\text{35}\) Hurston wrote the “Negro section” of the Florida Guide. Viewing folk culture as the nation’s unifier the guide matter-of-factly attributed the richness of Florida’s heritage to the “‘cracker,’ the Negro, the Latin-American, and the Seminole.” Descriptions of African Americans were well integrated throughout the volume that included some stereotypes—“Muscular prowess is a tradition with the Negro”—along with discussions of famous black journalist T. Thomas Fortune, whose career began in Florida, and Harlem Renaissance writer and native son James Weldon Johnson. The varied portrayals of black life in the states represented both the input of black writers and generally held attitudes about black Americans.\(^\text{36}\) Hurston’s writing evoked the nature of African Americans as a folk people in keeping with the overall tenor of the Series.

\(^{35}\) Ellison, one of the most important writers of the twentieth century wrote *Invisible Man* in 1953. An outstanding writer and anthropologist associated with the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1937. Jamaican writer and poet Claude McKay was the author of *Home to Harlem.*

The New York State guide chapter titled “Portrait of Harlem” offered a more textured and diverse portrait of a black community that included black nationalist Marcus Garvey, NAACP editor W.E.B. DuBois, and a host of community organizations from labor unions to artists’ groups. Still the book projects a picture of “the Negro” as different, exotic, not like us—an American problem to be solved—a people whose rich culture was overlaid with discrimination. “It has been said that the Negro embodies the ‘romance of American life’; if that is true, the romance is one whose glamour is overlaid with shadows of tragic premonition,” commented the writers. Even with the inclusion of black writers the prevailing attitudes of the time also prevail in the series. The American Guide books, although more sophisticated than other books of their time, still mirrored American culture in their approach to “Negroes” as generally unsophisticated and musical. Many of the books kept information about black life and culture in separate, segregated sections. The layout of the books in the series in this way duplicated the organization of the physical landscape. Even as the WPA guides attempted to include African Americans in the cultural life of the nation, the books tended to present black people as separate and as an underclass. With the exception of “famous” Negroes the black middle class was non-existent.

None of the traditional mainstream travel guides held much interest for African American travelers, nor could they be trusted to help black motorists negotiate travel in a segregated society. Even the summer haunts of the black elite, places like American Beach in Florida, Idlewild in Michigan, and Oak Bluffs on Martha’s Vineyard, were not

deemed worthy of inclusion in the American Automobile Association’s Guides or other travel guides. Black middle class motorists located hotels and resorts through word of mouth or through advertisements in black newspapers or in articles that appeared in periodical publications like *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, or *Ebony* until the creation of the first black travel guides.

In the 1930s entrepreneurs and institutions began publishing specialized guides to meet the very specific needs of black motorists. Alfred Smith addressed the need for travel guides that identified places welcoming African American guests in an article in *Opportunity* magazine:

> Obviously, the answer [to the problem of where to stay] lies in an authentic list of hotels, rooming houses, private homes catering to the occasional travellers, tourist camps and every type of lodging whatsoever, including those run by members of other races and open to Negroes; and the availability of such a list to our growing army of motor-travellers. Such a list would if complete, be invaluable (and I can hear your fervent amens) for I am convinced that within the area of fifty square miles of the more frequently traveled sections there are lodgings to be found at all times.38

Throughout the twentieth century, as organizations like the NAACP and the National Urban League sought to integrate public accommodations they also looked for ways to live within the existing racial system. Segregated hotels and boarding houses enabled black travelers and businessmen to conduct their business—which was often the business of fighting segregation—while away from home. “My Dear Madam,” wrote W.E.B. DuBois, editor of *Crisis* magazine, to Mrs. Sarah Harrison, Secretary of the Negro Welfare League in 1920, “could you tell me if there is a colored boarding house in New London? I expect to be driving through November 14 and would like to spend the

night.” Such letters were repeated over and over by African American travelers seeking acceptable overnight lodgings. Most black Americans passed information on from one to another about good places to stay or the best places to eat, but in 1920 there was no other way to find places to lodge overnight. The Negro Urban League, also known as the Negro Welfare Council, to whom the letter was directed, received numerous letters each year. It was the first organization to respond to the need for a guide to make travel more secure for African American motorists. In 1930, Sadie Harrison, Secretary of the Council, and publisher Edwin Hackley established *the Hackley & Harrison Hotel and Apartment Guide for Colored Travelers: Board, Rooms, Garage Accommodations, etc. in 300 Cities in the United States and Canada*. In its second year, 1931, the name of the booklet was changed to *The Travelers Guide: Hotels, Apartments, Rooms, Meals, Garage Accommodations, Etc. For Colored Travelers*. The guides focused on overnight lodgings for Negro travelers and advertised for subscribers and advertisers to help to sustain the guidebook. The Hackley and Harrison Guides reflect painstaking research, but the authors admitted the difficulty of trying to list the accommodations that existed in such a diverse and changing nation. The racial climate was confusing and variable:

> We have not sought and shall not seek to create or solve problems of communities. They are widely diversified and strangely conflicting. We have found directly opposite conditions existing in adjoining cities of the one State regarding racial attitudes and relations. Scattered thru the North and West are some strange anomalies. In many places transformation of sentiment is going on, forward or backward, the causes of which are easily traceable.

---

Many of the accommodations listed individual rooms offered in the private houses of black families rather than in public hotels, indicating the relatively small number of black hotels in existence in the 1920s and 1930s. Proprietors of these rooming houses were married women who were earning extra money for the household (they appear in the listings as Mrs. Ella Brown, or Mrs. Geo. Robinson, for example). Boarders in these establishments received lodging and frequently meals. A small number of boarding house listings were preceded by a “w” indicating that the proprietor was white, but willing to rent a room to an African American traveler. But most were in the houses of African American families. *The Travelers Guide* warned tourists that the quality of lodgings in private houses depended on the individuals and the “restrictions and inadequacies” of their facilities. Although they tried to include only sound accommodations, the authors could not guarantee that inclusion in the guide meant that the establishment provided superior housing.

Citing its purpose as specifically related to the rise in automobile use by African Americans, *The Travelers Guide* claimed four reasons for its publication. First, the guide hoped to help readers know the country better. This goal appealed to African Americans’ interest in the freedom to travel and in expanding their knowledge. Second, the book aimed to help fraternal, college, and club groups stay in contact with one another by providing information that would facilitate their national conventions. Third, *The Travelers Guide* supported African American leisure and vacation travel, and fourth the guide enabled African Americans to avoid the types of discrimination commonly found on public transportation. How long Harrison and Hackney’s guide was able to stay in
business is unknown, but a continuous stream of other guides designed specifically for African American tourists followed. Each one, although appealing to the same general audience, also represented particular constituencies, reflecting the diversity within the black middle class. For example, some guides appealed specifically to show business performers and others aided club and association conventioneers in locating accommodations for large groups. All of these books offered similar automobile tourist information on places to stay and attractions to visit that would be welcoming and cordial for the black business or family traveler.

African American travel guides generally appealed to a middle class clientele. They focused on the consumption of travel as a leisure or business activity and asserting themselves as written for a sophisticated and well-bred audience. “This class of travel,” notes The Travelers’ Guide, “in general is efficient, genteel and courteous in bearing and deserving of welcome in any hostelry or home.”\footnote{42} Writing a justification for the Negro Motorist’s Green Book in 1949, Standard Oil representative Wendall P. Alston identified the variety of audiences who desperately needed a special African American travel guide. Alston’s list appears like a list from the talented tenth. He mentions musicians in “top ranking orchestras and numerous minor ones, concert singers and various musical organizations,” black members of the major “Negro” organizations and businessmen and entrepreneurs. His list of those who were likely to use the Green Book included “touring clubs, students and teachers and many others in the field of education, numerous religious, sorority and fraternity groups.”\footnote{43}

\footnote{42} Harrison, The Travelers’ Guide, 1931. 1.
\footnote{43} Victor Green, The Negro Motorist Green Book, 1949. 3.
In addition lists of lodging, profiles of tennis clubs, municipal golf courses, vacation resorts, and romantic getaways helped middle class African Americans find the same types of elite vacation options that were open to white Americans. The members of the black middle class who used African American travel guides were perhaps a broader group than the white middle class, including the professional and business classes, but also those African Americans who might be considered working class by the white community. Porters and chauffeurs, many of whom were underemployed members of the black middle class based on education, were a significant market for black hotels and boarding houses. As such, many business establishments catered to these groups in addition to vacationing tourists. Advertisements in some black tourist guides specifically welcomed “colored tourists and chauffeurs.” *Negro Traveler* magazine sang the praises of Cleveland’s new Majestic Hotel noting “besides regular transit guests and permanent guests, the Majestic Hotel houses dining car cooks, waiters and porters from the large number of railroads that enter the city.” The guides exhibited extreme restraint in their language where race and civil rights were concerned, with positive non-confrontational writing. *Smith’s Tourist Guide*, for instance, was designed to “establish a closer relationship with all people in order to secure the cause of peace and justice.”

*Travelguide* offered readers “vacation and recreation without humiliation.” Some of the black travel guides included advertisements for sophisticated fashions, black beauty pageants, vacation gear, boats, and other middle class pastimes and consumer goods.

---

44 “Cleveland’s New Majestic Hotel,” *Negro Traveler*, (July/August 1948): 8.
46 *Travelguide*, 1947, 3.
Automobile manufacturers advertised in a few of the guides hoping to convince readers that their products were ideal vacation vehicles. Others listed historically black colleges or provided profiles of black Americans of achievement. Middle class black consumers used the guides to locate safe and welcoming travel accommodations. Black travelers could find all of the values and trappings of middle class life reflected in the travel guides.

Figure 4:3 The cover of the 1940 Negro Motorist Green Book listed hotels, garages, nightclubs, black barbershops and beauty parlors, and restaurants among its accommodations. The cover also noted that the guide was prepared in conjunction with the United States Travel Bureau, a federal program developed to promote tourism during the Depression. African American travel guides were essential for black travelers to find acceptable accommodations when mainstream travel guides ignored black Americans. Reproduced by permission, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
Victor Green produced the most successful and longest lasting travel companion designed to meet the challenges of segregated America in his 135th Street office in Harlem. *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, which later became the *Negro Traveler’s Green Book*, was first published in 1937, the same year that the Hackney guide was published.\(^{47}\) Green, the son of William and Alice Green grew up in a mixed race neighborhood in Bergen County, New Jersey where his father worked as a porter for the postal service. A striver and entrepreneur, Green obtained a position as a mail carrier in northern New Jersey, and later he tried his hand at several business ideas before getting involved in the travel business. A family member remembers an earlier business selling carvings of elephants and other African decorative items.\(^{48}\)

Other individuals and organizations soon identified a market niche and produced, with varying degrees of success, similar African American travel guides. In 1939, an African American automobile association called Smith’s Touring Club established an auto guide in Media, Pennsylvania. Smith compiled the booklet in collaboration with Standard Oil, and the company received high praise throughout the book’s pages for its willingness to sell dealerships to black owners and for its treatment of African Americans at Esso gas stations. Smith also worked with the African Methodist Episcopal Church and printed a listing of all of the denomination’s conventions nationwide in the back of the book. As black conventions tried to locate venues for their annual meetings special travel guides were a necessity. Finding one room for the night was difficult. Reserving

\(^{47}\) The masthead lists 1936 as the publication’s start date but 1937 is the correct date of publication. Another African American travel guide, *Grayson’s Guide* also appeared that year.\(^{48}\) Henry Johnson, interview with Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, April 1, 2006.
sufficient rooms for an African American fraternity or church convention could be almost impossible in certain regions of the country.

The quality of hotel accommodations was another concern raised regularly in African American travel guides. This concern inspired the founders of the *Go Guide to Pleasant Motoring* to make high-end facilities the focus of a travel book for black motorists. Segregated black facilities varied in quality—some fancy hotels catered specifically to middle class Negroes, and others like Saunders Redding’s bug-infested boarding house primarily served a clientele at the lower end of the economic spectrum. Many of the facilities available for African Americans were boarding houses—private homes with a hand-painted shingle hung outside advertising rooms for the night. Some were comfortable and spotlessly clean, and some provided a dingy room without the modern conveniences of flush toilets and running hot water.

*The Go Guide To Pleasant Motoring* found a part of its niche in the convention trade, although its founders hoped to appeal to a broad family market as well, advertising the booklet as a general “vacationer’s guide.” Published from 1952 to 1959, this book promoted hotels and motel complexes that could provide lodging for larger groups needing from 10 to 500 rooms or more. Many hotels and motels in the *Go Guide* listed the number of rooms available for reservation to make convention planning easier for fraternal and church groups.
The *Go Guide* was the official directory of the Nationwide Hotel Association, Inc. (NHA), a membership organization of black hotel and motel professionals who pledged themselves to provide superior service and quality to their customers. Members paid no dues to join the NHA. Participants gained membership by invitation only. Before receiving the NHA’s seal of approval, each facility required a site visit and inspection of the facilities. Members displayed the Nationwide Hotel Association emblem in their windows, indicating endorsement of the hotel for those looking for a modern, luxurious facility. A rating system insured that the premises met the standards of refinement and cleanliness that middle class customers sought. The “Pledge of Service” included all of the basics—heat and running water, impeccable cleanliness, daily fresh bed linens, and other amenities. Members were also required to insure a gentle atmosphere that included quiet in public halls, the elimination of rowdyism and vulgarity, the provision of comfortable mattresses, extra towels, and “kind and considerate hospitality” as the very minimum of service. Most importantly, all members were required to guarantee truth in advertising to potential patrons. The Nationwide Hotel Association board urged dissatisfied customers to file complaints directly with national headquarters in Washington, D.C. so that punitive action could be taken.49

William Brown, the manager of Harlem’s famous Theresa Hotel, established the NHA group with Washington D.C. public relations attorney Andrew F. Jackson. The NHA guide pressured some states to consider recognizing black Americans as a desirable market. With the clout of a national organization behind them, the Nationwide Hotel Association solicited and received letters from several mayors and governors inviting

---

black tourists to visit their states or cities. The letters were reprinted in the Go Guide to reassure tourists that they were welcome. But although the Atlantic City, New Jersey Board of Trade enticed tourists with promises of around-the-clock entertainment and “moonlight strolls on the boardwalk,” most of the lodgings listed in the guide were black hotels in the black neighborhood, far from the boardwalk. A few states listed in the Go Guides included such national chains as Hilton, Radisson, and Sheraton-Biltmore in the state-by-state listings, another indication of the gradual, although still agonizingly slow, pace of integration of public accommodations beginning in the 1950s.50

In addition to providing listings of high quality lodgings, the National Hotel Association also hoped to promote black business enterprises through advertising in the Go Guide. Services also included assisting members with financial and investment advice. The group met annually for a national convention, published a monthly newsletter, sponsored speakers, and established a scholarship fund for black students interested in business careers. The NHA also held an annual beauty pageant. This rather frivolous, leisure-time activity showcased attractive black young women from around the country and provided middle class African Americans with an event that celebrated black beauty and talent. The NHA billed the evening as the vacation event “of a lifetime.” The 1959 pageant, held in the Grand Ballroom of the Concourse Plaza Hotel in New York City, included all of the features of the Miss America pageant, with African American contestants. There were bathing suit, evening gown, and talent competitions and a fashion show of chinchilla and mink coats from Milton Herman, Furriers. The woman


160
crowned “Queen” represented the association during the next year as official Hotel Hostess.\(^{51}\)

The concerns expressed by musicians and performers about their inability to find housing while on the road inspired other African American travel guides designed specifically for show people and tourists with an interest in show business. Musician Billy Butler spent years on the road arranging and conducting for the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra. Frustrated, as a black musician trying to find a decent hotel, Butler published \textit{Travelguide} to assist others. As a board member of the Negro Actors League, the National Urban League, and the NAACP, Butler knew of the numerous letters from members requesting information about places to stay. The idea of this publication seemed like a good idea for a successful business venture. “\textit{Travelguide} affords a universal, economical and permanent publicity guide direct to the consumer,” noted an article in \textit{Color} Magazine, “and gains a part of the $500,000,000 spent annually by Negroes alone ‘just getting around.’”\(^{52}\) Butler later used his talents and his knowledge of the travel industry to become a successful travel agent in New York City.\(^{53}\) \textit{Travelguide} billed itself as offering “authentic guidance for ALL peoples,” and this focus on integration was evident throughout the publication. Butler’s \textit{Travelguide} sought to identify establishments that did not discriminate rather than simply listing segregated businesses. Through this approach Butler hoped to push the goals of the Civil Rights Movement. In the tenth year of operation, an article in \textit{Crisis} magazine commemorating


the milestone described *Travelguide* as “the only business ever started with the express idea that every effort would be made to eliminate those conditions which made it necessary.”\(^5^4\) If *Travelguide* succeeded at promoting integrated accommodations, theorized Butler, there would no longer be a need for it. The United States would be a fully integrated society. Throughout the booklet listings for dentists, drug stores, lawyers, music schools, and dry cleaners, all of the types of businesses a traveling performer might need, were interspersed with hotel and overnight accommodations. Unfortunately, while the agents for *Travelguide* were able to locate some hotels, motels, and restaurants that did not discriminate against people of color, many of the listings were the same boarding houses and hotels found in other travel books for African Americans. Butler imagined his publication of *Travelguide* as Civil Rights activism for integration with a gentle middle class hand and without angry confrontation.

*Travelguide* used an unusual research method to push Butler’s agenda of non-confrontational education about integration. Couples visited various resorts and demonstrated, through their sophisticated middle class demeanor, their worthiness to be granted full access to the accommodations. The mission of these emissaries was not to file lawsuits or create scandals in the local newspapers, but rather to cajole and convince through gentle persuasion.\(^5^5\) As the Civil Rights Movement progressed, however, a more powerful impetus for change emerged. An increasing number of white liberal travelers joined with *Travelguide* in supporting accommodations that did not discriminate.\(^5^6\)

\(^{5^4}\) “Travelguide Inc. founded in 1946 is now 10,” *Crisis*, (October 1955) 462.


\(^{5^6}\) Ibid.
White vacationers using their leisure dollars as a weapon against racism added clout to \textit{Travelguide}'s campaign and helped to open doors to public accommodations.

Seeking to broaden their educational mission the editors of \textit{Travelguide} also included profiles of prominent and inspiring black Americans. The 1947 edition included, among others, baseball player Jackie Robinson, described as a modest and clean-cut former U.S. army lieutenant, and Philippa Duke Schuyler, the child prodigy. The bi-racial Schuyler represented the ultimate triumph of integration, the daughter of African American journalist George Schuyler and Josephine Cogdell Schuyler, the daughter of a white Texas rancher. Philosophically, Schuyler’s bi-racial pedigree fit well into \textit{Travelguide}'s integrationist and internationalist worldview. A brilliant pianist hailed as the American Mozart, her parents and other liberals saw Philippa as an example of the superior human being who resulted from the best of African American and white racial mixing. In her parents’ eyes and in the eyes of some in the African American intellectual community, Philippa also defeated the popular argument that racial mixing would result in inferior humans and a diluted white race. Despite the well-meaning intentions of the Schuylers and those who agreed with them, this argument smacked of eugenics and sounded as racist as that of the southern bigots.\textsuperscript{57}

The \textit{Travelguide} philosophy of welcoming all people went beyond concern for African American tourists to encourage international visitors to the United States. The book informed readers about publications by the United Nations and listed consulates,

visa offices, United Nations missions, and embassies prominently among the listings for New York and Washington, D.C. *Travelguide*, whose headquarters office was located at United Nations Plaza, took a global approach to bringing people of different groups together and was the only African American travel guide to include these agencies and their contact information. The book reinforced its mission visually by using a globe of the world as its symbol.

A host of organizations lent their names and support to *Travelguide* and certainly offered their membership lists in an effort to sustain its international, integrationist passion. The membership of these organizations reflected white liberal support for the integration of public accommodations. The American Civil Liberties Union, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the National Council of Churches, and the Catholic Interracial Council lent their names and support to the booklet. Most notably, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) joined forces with *Travelguide*. The AME church’s mission to “induce free religious thought and action, to enlighten and uplift humanity and to awaken racial consciousness by stimulating a desire for independence, self-reliance and achievement in the minds of an oppressed minority,” fit nicely into the guide’s internationalist approach as well as providing a readymade market for Butler’s publication. In a full page at the beginning of the booklet the AME church contributed a brief history of the church and a list of current leaders. The church subtly encouraged their members to buy Butler’s *Travelguide* and to patronize the businesses listed in it that pledged themselves to creating a better United States. By doing so the
church leaders and the *Travelguide* staff hoped to use the power of the purse to affect change. Those who supported their grand mission would receive their business.

John F. Cook’s *The Negro Travel Guide*, like Billy Butler’s *Travelguide* focused on the world of entertainment. *Travelguide* was written with the concerns of performers in mind. Cook designed *The Negro Travel Guide* for those who loved nightlife and dancing and wanted to see performances by famous personalities at the best clubs, restaurants, and hotels. The cover of the 1948 edition featured a nighttime view of Times Square and interspersed throughout the book were tantalizing photographs of black stars like Hazel Scott, Thelma Carpenter, Pearl Bailey, and Cab Calloway. Lena Horne, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, and groups like Cats and the Fiddle or the Golden Gate Quartet regularly performed at the clubs described in the guide. Readers could locate a club that closed at midnight or find one that stayed open until four A. M. Many of the nightclubs described their menus, from filet mignon in New York to shrimp remoulade in New Orleans. Clearly intended for adult audiences, *The Negro Travel Guide* stood out among the other African American travel guides written for vacationing families and business travelers.

There were two compelling needs among the middle class black traveling community: practical needs—the need to know where you could stay for the night, who would welcome you, and where you could eat—and peace of mind—the security of knowing that you would have a place to sleep. African American travel guides enabled travelers to plan. Without them black motorists drove for hours looking for lodgings
before giving up and sleeping in their cars. Wealthy Texas businessman, Peter Lane,
opened a hotel specifically for black tourists in 1955, commented that many of his guests
frequently complained of driving more than 400 miles a day just because they “couldn’t
find any decent accommodations.”

Bemoaning the “old days” before African American travel guides such as the
Negro Motorist Green Book, when an African American traveler did not know what he
might encounter on the road, James A. Jackson wondered whether his bags would be
safe, whether his bed would have other occupants, whether he could lock his door, and
whether or not he would have to share his bed with “night companions such as those for
which D.D.T. had been created.” “It seems that the major bit of bathroom equipment
could be found anywhere from fifty to a hundred feet down the yard,” he continued, “and
on the way, a grape arbor afforded the only shelter from the storm.”

Middle class black Americans travelers wanted to find accommodations that were more than simply
adequate, that fit their middle class values, providing luxury as well as basic services.
“With greater job opportunities, higher incomes and paid vacations the Negro has come
into his own,” wrote Green Book staff writer Novera Dashiell. “He is selective. He is no
longer content to pay top prices for inferior accommodations and services.”

The Travelers Guide, The Go Guide to Pleasant Travel, Travelguide, the Negro
Motorist Green Book and others like them, reflected African American needs, but also
middle class values. Black Americans desired to fit into American society and to take

full advantage of their ability to travel just as white Americans could. Black corporate executives wanted hotels and restaurants with the same amenities that white executives expected. “I believe the Green Book was created in response to a growing auto tourist business that would support it,” James A. Jackson is quoted as telling the *Green Book’s* editor. “The traveler needs a ‘home away from home’ to the profit of those who make such homes available.”\(^\text{61}\)

---

Chapter Five

The Negro Motorist Green Book

“the most important book needed for Negroes who traveled anywhere in the United States”

A warm welcome and genial hospitality greeted visitors to Hazel and Clayton Sinclair’s guesthouse, Rock Rest in Kittery Point, Maine. The week’s fee of $65.00 per person included lodgings and two sumptuous meals daily cooked in Hazel’s kitchen. Hazel hired some of the local girls to help her in the dining room, but they were not to set foot in the kitchen. Hazel did not want anyone in the kitchen while she was cooking. The girls set the mahogany dining room table with Hazel’s hand-embroidered table cloths for breakfast and her crocheted cloths for dinner. Delicate flowered plates, green Depression glasses, and fresh flowers from the garden made the table bright and cheerful, the height of middle class elegance and gracious hospitality.

Before leaving for a day at the beach or shopping in the town nearby the Sinclairs’ guests ate a hearty home cooked breakfast of eggs and bacon or sausage, served with toast, grits, and coffee on most days. On special occasions Hazel served one of her signature dishes—cod fish balls in cream sauce with sliced hard boiled eggs. Sunday dinners were a special treat. Guests delighted in Rock Rest’s famous stuffed lobster served from showy green and red lobster plates.

---

1 Hazel charged $65.00 in 1968 and 1969 for on week’s lodging and two meals per day.
3 Ibid.
Clayton raised many of the fresh vegetables and rhubarb for the table in Rock Rest’s garden and gathered fresh eggs from his chickens each morning. Guests at Rock Rest spent their days walking along Maine’s rocky beaches or visiting local shops in Kittery or nearby Portsmouth. There were no prohibitions on African Americans spending their money with area businesses, but they were not welcome at local hotels.

Figure 5:1 A group of well-dressed ladies enjoyed one of Hazel Sinclair’s delicious meals in the dining room at Rock Rest in Kittery Maine. According to the Guest Book, a variety of regional African American clubs and church groups made reservations to eat here even if they were not guests. c. 1950s reproduced courtesy of University of Rhode Island, Rock Rest Collection.

Rock Rest, a small establishment, did not advertise in African-American guides like the Negro Motorist Green Book despite the guesthouse’s dependence on the automobile to bring tourists to the door. Awareness of the Sinclairs’ business was spread by word-of-mouth. The guest register indicates that the same families returned year after year to spend their summers with the Sinclairs. Lodgers were primarily African
American professionals—teachers, physicians, and clergy. Typical signers of the register include Dr. and Mrs. Branch visiting in 1948, 1949, and 1950, and Mr. and Mrs. Lee who came every year between 1949 and 1952. Dozens of other individuals and families discovered Rock Rest and made it their annual vacation destination. Clubs and religious groups booked the dining room for a meal in the evening, to sample Hazel’s clam bake, stuffed lobster, or fish dinners. The repeat business of customers who became friends returning year after year to Rock Rest kept the business prospering.

At the end of their season in September of 1952 the Sinclairs, exhausted from their hectic summer, struck out across the country in their car on a western vacation. Hazel kept a detailed diary of the trip commenting on their vacation lodgings, the food they ate, and the prejudice they encountered. Although they enjoyed the trip, the diary illustrated some of the problems that black families encountered as they traveled across the United States. The Sinclairs stayed in some African American motels; they found some hotels that were integrated; and the proprietors turned them away from other establishments. They were served an awful fish dinner in Youngstown, Ohio and Hazel angrily criticized the African-American establishment that served it. “Our colored is a dog,” she complained. “I am ready to go home now.” A sign Hazel read on the ladies room in a gas station in Gordon, Nebraska unnerved her enough for her to make note of it in the diary. The sign read, “no Indians allowed.” In Glenrock, Wyoming a café employee informed the Sinclairs that they would not be served breakfast because the shop did not “serve colored.”

---

4 Summer Guest Book, (Kittery, Maine: Rock Rest Collection).
5 Hazel Sinclair, Travel Diary (Kittery, Maine: Rock Rest Collection, 1952).
Hazel and Clayton did not advertise their own business in the *Green Book* although several tourist lodgings in Maine did purchase listings. The Sinclairs carried a copy of the *Green Book* with them when they went off on their own vacation at the end of the Maine tourist season. *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, the most long lasting of the African American tourist guides, provided a tool kit for middle class travelers like Hazel and Clayton that supplemented word of mouth recommendations and rumors. As they ventured out into what could be an intimidating landscape, guidebooks helped them to preserve their dignity and sense of propriety. The *Green Book* enabled them to maintain their class identity during travel by providing lists of suitably middle class lodgings for overnight accommodations and the location of desirable pasttimes like municipal golf courses that accepted black players.

“We obtained the most important book needed for Negroes who traveled anywhere in the United States,” wrote Earl Hutchinson, Sr. in his memoir of growing up “colored” in the twentieth century. “It was called the *Green Book*.” In the summer of 1955, Hutchinson and his wife decided to drive from Chicago to Berkeley, California to visit some friends. In preparation for the trip they joined the Chicago Auto Club that had just opened its membership to African American members, and they bought a copy of the *Green Book* to help them find accommodations along the way. According to Hutchinson, “The *Green Book* was the bible of every Negro highway traveler in the 1950s and early 1960s. You

---

6 For example, the 1959 *Negro Traveler’s Green Book* listed 7 tourist accommodations in the state of Maine: Mrs. Joseph McLean Tourist Home in Augusta; Bangor House in Bangor; Marigold Motel in Dixfield; Pond View Tourist Home in Gardiner; Mrs. R. Cumming’s Tourist Home in Old Orchard; Thomas House Tourist Home in Portland; Brook’s Bluff Cottage in Robbinston.
literally didn’t dare leave home without it.” The *New York Amsterdam News* called the *Green Book*, “the beacon light for the traveler and vacationer in the United States—the main instrument in making the Negro’s travels more pleasant.”\(^7\) The Hutchinsons, Sinclairs, and other middle class African American travelers depended on the *Green Book* to find welcoming accommodations. Carrying the *Green Book* also gave black travelers confidence that they would not be stranded in hostile territory. It gave them a sense of security and emotional comfort. Travelers knew where they would be received hospitably and where they would not. As a grateful admirer explained the importance of the *Green Book* in a letter to the publisher in 1939, “*The Negro Motorist Green Book* will mean as much if not more to us than the A.A.A. means to the white race.”\(^8\)

With the confidence provided by having the book in hand Hutchinson, at least, was willing to face rejection by testing a few places. “If it was in the afternoon and I spotted a vacancy sign at a motel not listed in the *Green Book*, and there were few cars in the motel lot, I would try to get a room. In most cases the clerk had an arsenal of excuses ready.” Desk clerks had all sorts of ways of immediately discovering their facilities full if an African American traveler happened to stop and ask for a room. “We’ve just rented the last room and haven’t taken the sign down yet,” was a popular excuse. Or, “we’re expecting a large group shortly.”\(^9\)

Figure 5:2 Victor H. Green, founder of the *Negro Motorist's Green Book*. Despite Green’s prolific publishing record, very little biographical information about him exists. Green grew up in Hackensack, New Jersey where he later worked as a letter carrier and served in World War I. After publishing the *Negro Motorist’s Green Book* for twenty-four years, he died in the Veterans’ Hospital in 1960 at the age of 67.10

The *Green Book* staff grew dramatically over the life of the publication, but the staff was never large. In the 1961 issue, the *Green Book* writers introduced the staff and their history. Green founded the book with a short-lived partner George L. Smith. Later his older brother, William Green, joined the company until his death in 1945. Victor Green’s own retirement “from active participation” followed in 1952, probably because of illness. Victor’s wife, Alma, assumed the role of publisher of the *Green Book* from that time onward, and Victor stepped into the role of advisor. When Alma took over, an all-female staff managed and wrote the *Green Book*, making it a particularly unusual

---

10 Victor Hugo Green was born in New York on November 9, 1892 to William and Alice Green. Green’s father worked as a porter for the United States Post Office. Census records describe William and Alice as black, but Victor, his sister Helen, and older brother William, Jr., perhaps because of their fair skin, were listed as mulatto. Information on Victor Green was drawn from the Federal Census of Population for 1900, 1920, and 1930; World War I Draft Registration Card, 1917-1918, Bergen County, New Jersey, roll 1711908, Draft Board 2; “Services Held Victor Green” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 22, 1960.
publishing business for the early 1950s. Most women-owned businesses during the 1950s focused on services like childcare, dressmaking, hair care, and secretarial work. A female publisher was a rarity.\textsuperscript{11} Described as “attractive and astute,” Alma must also have been a strong and creative businesswoman to keep the publication going when other African American travel guidebooks failed. While a variety of other employees worked for the company at different times, Alma Green’s all-female staff stayed with the team well into the 1960s. Evelyn Woolfolk, who worked as a secretary when the \textit{Green Book} began, returned from a hiatus in Cleveland to sell advertising for the publication. Novera Dashiell wrote most of the “articles and commentary,” and Dorothy Asch, “the only non-Negro member of the staff,” managed public relations.\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{12} As a part of the Silver Anniversary of the \textit{Green Book}, an article titled, “Janus,” by Novera Dashiell in the 1961 edition described the progress and history of the publication and its staff. In Greek mythology, Janus was the Roman god of gateways and doors. Dashiell noted that the \textit{Green Book} was no longer confined to the “American Negro traveler,” but had opened new doorways to foreign countries. Victor Green, \textit{The Travelers’ Green Book}, (New York: Victor Green and Company, 1961) 4-6.
Figure 5:3 Alma Green, Victor's "attractive and astute" wife who took over management of the *Green Book* when he retired in 1952. Collection of the Author

Figure 5:4 Alma Green's all-female staff from the 1961 *Negro Travelers’ Green Book*. The women stayed with Victor Green and Company for many years and had a considerable effect on the publication. A publishing business with an all-female and integrated staff was unusual in the 1950s and 1960s. Collection of the Author
“Let’s get together and make Motoring better,” urged Victor Green explaining the goal of his travel guide. Green hoped to provide black motorists with all of the services they needed to make travel as easy and stress-free as possible. An astute businessman, Green also wanted to provide a wide variety of services to as large an audience as possible. Reaching out to the black middle class meant appealing to people with a diversity of backgrounds and income levels. The black middle class included black professionals—doctors, clergy and teachers, corporate executives, business owners like barbers and beauty shop operators, and train men: porters, dining car waiters, and cooks. Organizations like fraternities and sororities, clubs, schools, and professional organizations that met annually for conventions also needed assistance when their members traveled. To meet this range of needs, Green advertised his guide as appealing “to everyone,” and in pursuit of a large heterogeneous readership listed a variety of types of accommodations—from hotels and motels to guesthouses and YMCAs—at a range of prices. He pushed advance planning as the most important way to make the difference between a successful and a difficult trip for African American travelers. Green believed that making reservations for a trip, prepaying for at least one night’s lodging, and confirming reservations in advance would provide travelers with the greatest possibility of being accepted when they arrived. “DON’T BE DISAPPOINTED—Make reservations in advance,” Green exhorted his readers. Most travel guides made advance preparations a universal recommendation because of the difficulty in finding hotel rooms for African Americans. “Housing conditions make this necessary,” the Green Book noted.13 Identify places to stay in advance rather than roaming the countryside searching for a place to stay.

While other Negro travel guides struggled with financial difficulties, The Green Book never missed a year of publication. Although no records for the business are known to exist, clues to Green’s success appear in the black press, in the pages of the Green Book, and occasionally in the mainstream press. A savvy businessman, Victor Green proudly told his readers, shortly after he began publication, that the United States Tourist Bureau had officially adopted his travel guide. This national organization, founded in 1937 as a part of the Department of the Interior, ran one of many programs designed to promote employment after the Depression by encouraging Americans to travel. The Tourist Bureau also served as a clearing-house for information produced by others, like the Negro Motorist Green Book. Access to this national network certainly helped to insure broad distribution of the guide. A 1941 article in the New York daily newspaper PM Daily introduced liberal whites to the Green Book and gave it a significant boost. Green, proud of this article, wrote about it as a milestone for the guidebook. “Year after year it [the new book] grew until 1941 ‘PM’ one of New York’s great white newspapers found out about it, wrote an article about the guide and praised it highly.” The article, titled “Even off Subways, Negroes Follow the Green Line,” brought attention to the problem of discrimination faced by African Americans when they traveled and also

---

14 There are no extant records of the United States Tourist Bureau within the collections of the National Park Service; however, the Travel USA Bulletin is held in the Kelvin Smith Library of Case Western Reserve University. The Bulletins are published online at http://library.case.edu/ksl/govdocs/travel/about.html
promoted the *Green Book* as the necessary guide for black Americans hoping to avoid embarrassment and danger.\(^\text{15}\)

Affiliation with the Standard Oil Company became the most advantageous business relationship for the *Green Book*. Standard Oil brought marketing support and visibility within the black community to the travel guide, but the relationship was one of mutual benefit because the oil company enjoyed considerable cachet among black Americans for its support and its policies of integration. A progressive company, Standard Oil recognized and actively solicited the black community as an important group of potential customers long before other businesses in the nation sought black patronage. However, Standard Oil and other corporations strategically placed their black executives in the marketing department with the mission of attracting black customers to the company’s products.

In 1934 James A. Jackson started at Standard Oil as a special “representative to the race” to conduct research and promote sales to the black community. Hiring Jackson was a coup for Standard Oil. The 1939 *Green Book* noted that the company “created a sensation back in 1934 when it announced that James A. Jackson had been retained.” Jackson began his professional career as the first African American bank clerk in Chicago. He then served a stint as editor of the Negro Department of *Billboard Magazine*, a position that made him well known among African Americans and resulted in his nickname, “Billboard.” Claude Barnett, a black Chicago businessman proposed

Jackson to then Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover for a position in the Commerce
Department to promote and support black business. Barnett commanded considerable
influence in the national Republican Party for a black man in the early twentieth century.
A protégé of Booker T. Washington, he founded the ANP, a national African American
wire service, the black equivalent of the Associated Press. Hoover decided to support
Barnett’s recommendation for a Negro Affairs position, even if reluctantly, because he
saw the constituency of black businessmen as having made significant gains in the teens
and 1920s. Hoover believed that black businesses might have potential for additional
growth and he sought to create synergistic relationships between private business
enterprises and the federal government. He hoped that by passing on information and
educating the public a collaboration would “energize private and local collectivities,” put
people back to work, and stimulate the flagging economy.\footnote{Jason Chambers, Madison

In 1927 Jackson was appointed the Advisor on Negro Affairs at the Commerce
Department. Standard Oil lured Jackson away from the federal government to a position
in the marketing department of Esso gasoline, a Standard Oil product. In 1945 Standard
Oil hired Wendell P. Alston to work with Jackson and possibly succeed him. Alston and
Jackson regularly contributed brief articles to the \textit{Green Book} using their own
experiences as corporate travelers to reinforce the need for the book and to sing its
praises. As Esso marketing representatives, the two men traveled together all over the
country promoting “happy motoring” with Esso gasoline and motor products. Despite
their positions in the corporate world, Jackson and Alston found it particularly difficult to locate overnight accommodations. Jackson commented that the stress and unpleasantness created by trying to find hospitable and acceptable lodgings detracted from his work and peace of mind. He found the *Negro Motorist Green Book* an invaluable guide for businessmen and a tool that would have changed his working life had it existed when he began working. Travel produced considerable strain on the black middle class:

If there had been such a publication as this when I started traveling way back in the Nineties, I would have missed a lot of anxieties, worries and saved a lot of mental energy which, had it been conserved and used solely to the advancement of the business interests for which I traveled, ‘my years on the road’ might have been concluded long ago, with enough savings to permit my living a life of peace and quiet, now that I am becoming an old codger.17

So impressed were the two men, who were referred to as “[t]he Esso Marketers Public Relations men of the race group,” with the *Green Book*, that they determined to find ways of placing it in the hands of the traveling African American public. With their ringing endorsement, Standard Oil distributed the *Green Book* through its wholesale outlets—Esso gas stations. Jackson informed *Green Book* readers that “Esso hoped to attract the growing number of black motorists to Esso service stations.” In exchange the *Green Book* happily advertised Esso products. “‘Happy Motoring’—use Esso Products and Esso Services wherever you find the Esso sign,” urged an article in the *Green Book*.18 Further distribution of the Green travel guide to travel bureaus, bus and airline

---

companies, the armed forces, and automobile clubs helped to insure the book’s success. In 1962, the Green Book boasted a circulation of 2,000,000.  

Green’s first guidebook for the traveling motorist, begun in 1936 and published in 1937, highlighted the places and businesses in and around New York City accessible to African American travelers. Also included were a few establishments outside of New York, but east of the Mississippi River. The slim, paperback volume provided readers with a few short articles and a variety of advertisements. The guide portion of the booklet listed “Points of Interest in New York City.” The recommended places to visit included outdoor or publicly owned sites such as the Tri-Borough Bridge, Chinatown, Ellis Island, and Rockefeller Center. Many of the sites, particularly the bridges and tunnels, could be easily accessed on a driving tour without leaving the car. The guide touts Coney Island as a place offering “bathing and all sorts of open air amusements.” A pitch for the 1939 World’s Fair described this soon-to-be attraction as the “greatest exhibition that has ever been produced by any country in the world.” The only museum described in this edition of the Green Book was the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History, whose sky show, “The Drama of the Skies,” could provide an afternoon or evening’s entertainment for 25 or 35 cents. “Let’s Go Places,” a feature of the early guide, listed regional state parks and public golf courses accessible to African Americans. Golf was growing in popularity for the African American and the white middle class, but African Americans found it difficult to find places to play. Almost all golf country clubs were closed to the middle class black players who had taken up the

---

sport early in the century. A group of African American men purchased the Shady Rest Country Club in Westfield, New Jersey in 1920s. Reminiscing about the club, a former member commented on their all-black membership— “there was no other place open to us.” Shady Rest received no mention in the American Automobile Association’s Green Book among the national listing of golf clubs, country clubs, and yacht clubs, but it was included in the Negro Motorist’s Green Book.

Green credited Jewish guides as the inspiration for his new venture. “The Jewish press has long published information about places that are restricted,” he wrote. During the first half of the 20th century, Jewish Americans experienced discrimination in public accommodations similar to that faced by black Americans. Although they generally did not fear physical violence, Jewish travelers found that traditional travel guides did not address their needs. An advertisement might make a hotel or restaurant sound welcoming, but when the concierge heard a name that sounded Jewish no room or table would be available. Despite looking like other white Americans, Jewish Americans were excluded from many hotels and other public accommodations. Code words like “restricted” and “selected clientele” placed in brochures meant, “no Jews allowed.”

Upstate New York Adirondack Mountain resorts from the 1920s and 1930s, famous for

20 Mark S. Foster, "In the Face of "Jim Crow": Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945," Journal of Negro History 84 Number 2 (1999): 144.
their anti-Semitism, openly announced, “Hebrews as a rule also being objectionable.”

Others advertised that they accepted gentile patronage only stating openly, “No Hebrews desired.” New York State passed anti-discrimination legislation in 1943 outlawing the use of “selected” and “restricted” accommodations. But as late as the 1950s, letters to the New York Times complained that the use of a new euphemism, “churches nearby,” in an advertisement communicated the message that Jews were unwelcome. Henry Schultz, National Chairman of the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai Brith, urged the state of New York to recognize the use of the phrase “churches nearby” as “illegal and un-American” and sought to ban its use in resort advertising.

Jewish travel guides served multiple purposes: they provided information on places that served officially sanctioned kosher food and listed hotels that welcomed Jewish travelers and had a largely Jewish clientele. Jewish guides served a key cultural function for observant Jews as well by helping Jews maintain their identity in the midst of a nation that pushed for assimilation.

From 1935 to 1952 the Organized Kashruth Laboratories in New York City published the quarterly Kosher Food Guide. Their aim was primarily to “serve as a guide to the Observant Jewish Woman desiring to uphold the traditional dietary laws.” Amidst articles about the proper observance of the Jewish holidays and lists of approved packaged foods (Breakstone’s cottage cheese and Hershey’s chocolate received the O.K.

---

22 In addition to “Hebrews” many of the establishments in the Adirondack Mountains also discriminated against tuberculosis patients. Ironically, the Adirondack region of New York State was the first and one of the largest regions in the nation for tuberculosis treatment from the late 19th century to 1940s. For a history of TB in the Adirondacks see, Sheila M. Rothman, Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History, (New York: Basic Books) 1994.

23 The Adirondack Museum Library, Manuscript collection, resort brochures.

symbol for an acceptable kosher product), the *Kosher Food Guide* also included lists of accepted hotels, summer resorts, camps, and caterers.\(^\text{25}\) Jewish newspapers and periodicals like *The Philadelphia Jewish Exponent*, *The American Hebrew*, and the *Baltimore Jewish Times* contained advertisements for hotels, restaurants, and vacation resorts that catered specifically to Jewish travelers and provided for their dietary and religious needs.

Figure 5.5 This cartoon, “A Hint to the Hebrews,” appeared in Puck Magazine in 1881, but well into the twentieth century Jews faced discrimination in public accommodations. In the cartoon American Jews are stereotyped as undesirables swarming the beach and hanging from the hotel balconies. Since they were not wanted by mainstream Americans, the artist proposed that American Jews on vacation could make themselves independent of the usual watering holes by cutting themselves off and creating their own segregated hotel on a raft called, “Hotel de Jerusalem.” Reproduced courtesy, New York State Historical Association
Victor Green found the Jewish travel guides an inspiration and model for his *Green Book*. Like the Kosher Food Guide, the early *Green Books* focused on the New York City metropolitan area. Green filled his first guide with advertisements for car care businesses, an indication of the importance that the *Green Book* staff placed on car maintenance. Writers and advertisers encouraged motorists to treat their cars with care to avoid mechanical problems on the road. An article in the premier edition entitled “PREPAREDNESS” discussed the necessity of a pre-trip tune-up—checking the steering, brakes, and lubrication, and carrying extra headlamp bulbs and fuses along just in case of a mishap. The automobile, after all, was a protective environment for the African American traveler alone on the road. While these recommendations could apply to any traveler, they took on special meaning for African American motorists.26

Most editions of the *Green Book* included articles, but these short pieces were by no means the focus of each book. They merely provided helpful travel tips—brief interludes between the advertisements and hotel listings. Some editions included no articles, but instead provided lists of suggestions on how to protect your house while you were away or how to properly pack your suitcase. A few issues offered substantial articles suggesting travel options that would provide the least chance of embarrassment for African Americans. For example, the national parks figured prominently in some editions of the *Green Book*. “We wish to bring to your attention, the non-discriminatory policy of the nation’s National Parks,” wrote Novera Dashiell, Assistant Editor.

“Regardless of the policies of the City or State where they are located, concessionaires

are obligated [to] and do cater without discrimination.” Like other African American travel writers, the Green Book staff viewed it as their responsibility to identify safe and pleasant places to visit. Extensive articles featured profiles of cities with large and welcoming black neighborhoods that catered to tourists, like Chicago and Louisville. The profiles included an African American-friendly history of each city. The article on Louisville briefly acknowledged its slave past, but encouraged visitors to participate in the excitement of the Kentucky Derby and enjoy the gracious living of southern hospitality. To the readers of the Green Book, southern hospitality took on the gentle face of a bountiful table with cold mint juleps, not the buxom mammy or cotton picking slave that characterized southern hospitality for white Americans.

“What to See in Chicago” focused less on history and more on the excitement of the city’s museums, ballparks, and sites. The images and attractions included in this article demonstrate the difference in perspective between a travel article designed for the mainstream white community and one written for the black traveling public. A photograph of Comiskey Park, obviously taken in the segregated black section of the bleachers, reminded readers that Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, Satchel Paige, Larry Doby, ‘Mule Suttles,’ and Buck Leonard had played there. Other photographs, instead of highlighting the Historical Society or the Art Institute—buildings found in most Chicago travel guides, provided images of interest to black readers: the building housing the city’s largest African American insurance company, a large black-owned funeral parlor, and the

---


28 Chapter three discusses the white American vision of southern hospitality. The sexless black mammy in head wrap and slave dress appeared in advertisements, on souvenirs, and restaurant menus symbolizing good cooking and servility.
block that housed the Regal theater and the Savoy Ballroom. These buildings trumpeted the success of black businesses. While not the traditional tourist sites, these architectural monuments of the black community represented a source of pride in the accomplishments of the city’s black citizens. This article also recommended sites for African Americans to visit in Chicago’s “Ghetto.” The term “Ghetto” in American English usually referred to a black community. But in this black travel guide the word referred to the city’s Russian Jewish neighborhood.29

The Green Book’s articles helped travelers to determine what to do once they arrived in a city and provided an African American perspective on tourism. While the focus article on New York City in the 1949 issue offered a very traditional travelogue with photographs of the George Washington Bridge, Times Square, and the Statue of Liberty, unlike other travel guides it praised Harlem referring to the neighborhood with the positive terms “metropolis” and “city.” It began with a description of Harlem: “Harlem—The greatest Negro metropolis in the world where over 300,000 colored people live, between 110th and 155th Sts.” “Here you will find a city in itself: fine restaurants, taverns, nightclubs and department stores.” The accompanying photograph reinforced the idea of an active, successful, and vibrant urban community where black tourists were always welcome. At the busy intersection of 7th Avenue and 125th Street the sidewalks were filled with well-dressed pedestrians walking past cars and taxis, bustling shops, billboards, and the Alhambra Theater. Following the article, dozens of

listings for restaurants, taverns, and places for nighttime entertainment described establishments ready to receive travelers.\(^{30}\)

As well as providing a wide variety of travel advice to the black community, the *Green Book* also sold advertisements for travel products to prospective black tourists and business travelers. Advertising was an important part of the 1937 *Negro Motorist Green Book* and an integral part of each edition throughout the life of the publication. Although a few travel guides promoted themselves as avoiding all advertising in order to keep their listings “honest,” most depended on ads for a large share of their revenue. The advertisements echoed the needs and values of the decades in which they appeared. The advertisements in the earliest editions reflected the novelty of automobiles and the concerns about keeping these modern contraptions from breaking down. In the first *Green Book*, dozens of advertisements for black owned businesses in the New York metropolitan area encouraged readers to patronize “automobile blacksmiths,” car and radio repairmen, electric and acetylene welders, and tire salesmen who would be friendly to black people. Clanrod Jones, an “Automobile Technician” since 1913, could be found on East 136\(^{\text{th}}\) Street teaching driving, repairing cars, and selling generators. Restaurants, dance halls, beauty salons, and pharmacies catering to black Americans found a ready audience in readers of the *Green Book*. Advertisements for “Westchester’s Sepia Rendezvous” and Harris’ Tea Room, a family restaurant, publicized good home cooking. Donhaven in Pleasantville, New York encouraged readers to enjoy a sojourn in the country with dinner and dancing for couples and club groups. Many of the advertisements appealed to southern migrants who lived in New York with display ads

\(^{30}\) Ibid.
that promoted “southern hospitality,” the best southern fried chicken, and “southern home cooking.”

Figure 5:6 Sample advertisements from the *Green Book*. Most advertisers stressed courteous service and included pictures of themselves to show readers that they ran black owned businesses. The drawing at the bottom of the page shows that Green hoped to appeal to train travelers as well as motorists. Collection of the Author

---

The growth of the black tourist business community figured prominently in the *Green Book*. The ads for businesses indicate Green’s effectiveness in tracking down lodgings for black tourists. By the 1960s the *Green Book* included only a few articles but many full-page display advertisements designed to entice tourists. Businesses purchased a simple address listing or a larger display ad with stock art and additional details about their services. Beard’s Vanity Beauty Shoppe explained the use of the popular “electric vigorol scalp treatments” designed to nourish hair weakened by hot irons and other straightening techniques.\(^{32}\) The Wheel Motel in Texarkana, Texas included a photograph of tidy tourist cabins beside a small diner with the slogan, “your home away from home.” The Bay Shore Hotel, a resort right on the Chesapeake Bay, included a photograph of a private black beach and publicized year-round comfort in rooms that were air conditioned in summer and heated in the winter. Even more elegant, the Hampton House and Villas in Miami, Florida catered to “the Negro vacationer who enjoys luxurious surroundings, superb cuisine and an exciting sports and entertainment program designed for all ages,” including swimming, boating, fishing, and golf. Calling Hampton House the “social center of the south,” and using a crown as its corporate logo, the hotel signaled an interest in attracting the most affluent black consumers.\(^{33}\)

Green and his staff gathered advertisements for inclusion in the *Green Book* in several ways. Black travelers shared suggestions of places where they had stayed and which they found to be satisfactory with the *Green Book* staff. These recommendations were designed to insure that only “recommended” establishments appeared in the books,


although a caveat printed in each volume reminded visitors that the listings were printed as presented to the staff and that the *Green Book* accepted no responsibility for errors. In addition to testimonials from customers, Green enlisted the help of sales agents and asked his readers to consider selling subscriptions and advertising for the guide on a part-time basis. The sales agents had considerable knowledge about places that African Americans could spend the night and shared that information with Green. “The *Green Book* gets much of its information from travel agents,” commented an article in *Newsweek* in 1963. Green’s agents gathered and recommended businesses to be listed and contacted travel agents for their recommendations.³⁴ The 1949 edition of the *Green Book*, for example, identified advertising representatives for Mississippi, New Jersey, and West Virginia.

Mrs. Leroy P. Bass of the Piney Woods School, a boarding school for African American children, served as the representative for Mississippi and was an expert at booking travel accommodations. Nellie Jones Hardy Bass was the sister of the well-known and charismatic founder and President of the Piney Woods School, Dr. Laurence C. Jones. Jones established his boarding school for African American children in 1909 and traveled throughout the country publicizing and raising money to support it. His sister, Mrs. Bass, learned where to find hotels, restaurants, and other African American businesses any place in the country. At the Piney Woods School she booked singing engagements (from 1922 to 1975) and made housing and travel arrangements for the traveling musical groups—the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, the Cotton Blossom Singers, and the Swinging Rays of Rhythm—who toured about six months a year as ambassadors and fundraisers for Piney Woods. Bass also reserved rooms and helped schedule the Piney Woods.

---

Woods Baseball Team as they traveled the Negro Leagues’ circuit playing against teams like the Homestead Grays. It was not easy to find housing for black students. Sometimes Bass had to identify rooms in private homes because no hotels would take blacks. So difficult was the task of finding housing in some parts of the country that a Piney Woods donor and friend of Dr. Jones, Albert Alexander Hyde, designed a vehicle for the Cotton Blossom Singers that included a kitchen and sleeping quarters. This early recreational vehicle, a direct outgrowth of segregation, could be parked in a church parking lot or campground for the night. Although he used relatively few agents, Green’s approach of using individuals with broad national experience like Mrs. Bass enabled the Green Book staff to successfully identify large numbers of hotels, tourist homes, and guesthouses across the country. Armed with recommendations from readers and his sales agents and with lists of tourist homes and black community services assembled from the previous year, Green sent out annual letters asking business owners to advertise in the Green Book.

---

Figure 5:7 This letter, sent by Victor Green to Miss Sing's Tourist Home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, asked her to renew her advertisement in the Green Book for the next year. Miss Sing operated a guest house for musicians and other black travelers from the 1940s into the 1960s. This letter from 1959/1960, the 24th year of the Green Book, was discovered tucked inside the hotel’s guest book which was given to Kevan Cullins by Miss Sing in exchange for electrical work. By the 1960s the booklet was called the Negro Travelers' Green Book, instead of the Negro Motorist Green Book probably indicating the growing emphasis on air travel. Reproduced courtesy Kevan Cullins, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
In addition to outside advertisers, Green filled some of the advertising space with ads for additional services offered by his company, Victor H. Green & Co. Acting as a travel agent, Victor Green organized bus and boat trips around Manhattan for customers and planned vacation cruises to Africa, South America, Europe, Canada, and the West Indies. Green believed that travelers were less likely to experience discrimination with confirmed reservations. The *Green Book* staff ran a reservation service assisting travelers in contacting the hotels, tourist homes, and resorts that appeared in the guide to secure overnight accommodations.³⁶

Beginning as a sixteen-page pamphlet, the *Green Book* increased to a substantial paperback handbook of more than 128 pages over its thirty year run. Each year the staff adapted and expanded it to meet the changing needs of the growing readership. Two years after the initial publication, the 1939 edition showed considerable growth in the number of listings. By the late 1960s the book included black hotels, restaurants, and roadside services all over the United States and later Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean and also black community establishments such as doctors’ offices, pharmacies, taverns, grocery stores, barbershops, and beauty parlors. Of course, the inclusion of every state in the union did not mean that *Green Book* correspondents located accommodations for Negro travelers in all states. But black motorists had a starting place for the information they needed to make informed decisions about travel. And they needed to know whether or not to travel to a particular state. A respondent from North Dakota wrote, for example, that the state had no “Negro families” but assumed that any black visitors would be

treated “as well as anyone else.”

The traveler, informed of the uncertainty, was free to take a chance—or not.

Each edition of the *Green Book* included state-by-state listings, the vast majority of them in major cities in the east like New York, Washington, Cincinnati, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, and in west coast cities like Los Angeles. Relatively few listings appeared in states like South Dakota and Wyoming where the black population was small. The entire state of Idaho had listings of only six places for black tourists to stay. Nevada had three—two in Reno and one in Las Vegas. On the other hand, the New York neighborhood of Harlem included 244 sites that welcomed African American guests, more than twice as many as several states offered. Furthermore, Harlem offered a variety of accommodations and services. Lodgings ranged from tourist camps and motels in small towns to multi-story hotels in large cities. In many cities black YMCAs and YWCAs were the only places available for black travelers, although not all black “Y”s had dormitory rooms. A significant proportion of the listings in the *Green Book*, particularly in the early editions, were for black “Y”s.

Black YMCAs represented the largest national network of black lodgings for Negroes during the first half of the twentieth century. With ownership of physical facilities that included gymnasiums, cafeterias, and dormitory rooms black YMCAs

---

38 The number of black YMCAs listed in the Green Books declines steadily in the 1960s. In 1967 the National YMCA officially banned segregation in the organization. The University of Minnesota Library that houses the Kautz Archives on the history of the Black YMCA includes an online timeline of the history of the Black YMCA that can be accessed at http://special.lib.umn.edu/ymca/guides/afam/afam-milestones.phtml.
provided an ideal system to provide safe havens for travelers. Founded in the 1850s as the Confederation of North American YMCAs, the all-white organization dedicated itself to Christian ideals and building character in men. Canadian YMCAs, troubled about America’s slave past and concerned about living up to the organization’s Christian mission pressured the American “Y” to consider including black men. Separate YMCAs for African Americans became a part of the American organization’s policy in the late 1870s. The newly appointed international secretary for African-American YMCA work traveled to historically black colleges to promote the development of black YMCAs throughout the country. African American YMCAs offered places for young men to spend the night in clean and commodious lodgings, to meet one another, to conduct business, to share a meal, to exercise, and to participate in educational programs. For this reason, although hardly luxurious, black YMCAs were popular with ambitious students and some business travelers.\footnote{Nina Mjagkij, \textit{Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946} (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2003) 3-7; Arthur George, “The Young Men's Christian Association Among Negroes.” \textit{Opportunity} 1923; 16-18.}

In addition to the brief \textit{Green Book} listings containing name, address, and telephone number, display advertisements offered readers pictures of tourist camps, of room interiors, or of the smiling African American proprietors. Most stressed the welcoming, courteous service that patrons could expect; finding welcoming service was important to black Americans so used to discourteous treatment.\footnote{This information is based on the 1949 \textit{Green Book}, but other editions include similar listings for each state.} A 1950 national map showing the “distribution of the Negro population across the United States” indicates that the vast majority of \textit{Green Book} establishments could be found in places where black
Americans were clustered. As would be expected, most hotels, motels, and tourist attractions for black travelers were located near black population centers.41

Special editions of the *Green Book* kept the traveling public up to date on trends in the tourism industry, discussed various methods of travel, and helped black travelers feel more confident about how well they might be received. As the push for civil rights heated up in the 1950s and 1960s, black travel guides encouraged readers to experiment with new destinations and new forms of transportation. The 1953 Airline Edition of the *Negro Motorist Green Book* included ads by Green proposing trips on board cruise ships or group tours. The article titled “Air Transportation” discussed the history of Pan American World Airways, American Airlines, and Trans World Airlines. It did not discuss race. The “silence” of the article actually broadcasted its message that no discrimination would be found on airplanes. The article focused on the wide variety of destinations available to air travelers and the growing accessibility of flying to middle-income people. *The Green Book* encouraged African Americans to vacation by air as the method of transportation that in Victor Green’s opinion would incur the least amount of discrimination.

While the automobile gave African Americans the freedom to travel from coast to coast, the airplane opened up new opportunities for travel abroad. Although African Americans as a group had lower salaries than white Americans, the new lower airline fares in the 1950s placed international travel well within the reach of the black middle class. “Thrifty, medium income Americans who had never previously thought a trans-

---

41 See appendix C for a map of the United States showing the distribution of the African American population in 1950 and the distribution of Green Book establishments throughout the country.
Atlantic trip possible will soon be arriving in Europe in large numbers, thus bringing into sharp focus the social impact of the 30 percent reduction in fares. . .,” the article commented. Another special edition called the International Travelers’ Green Book for 1965-68 focused on the New York World’s Fair. The cover illustration featured a well-dressed, African American girl in a traveling dress and matching jacket with a camera around her neck, obviously ready to head to the fair. In her white-gloved hands she held a clutch purse and a makeup case. Beside the pert young woman, two boys—one white and one black,— carried a suitcase together. The image reflected the way that the black middle class saw themselves—stylish and respectable. It expressed their hopes for integration, a black child and white child carrying a suitcase together.

Inside the issue a tantalizing photograph of African American dancers in 1960s dashikis, caftans, and other West African clothing popular among black Americans, introduced readers to a special center section on the World’s Fair. The unidentified photograph demonstrated the ongoing interest in African culture among the black middle class. At the same time, the varied African clothing indicated a lack of specific and detailed knowledge about the differences among countries and cultures in West Africa from which black people in the United States descended. The accompanying narrative section of the special insert provided details on everything a tourist to the New York World’s Fair needed to know for an enjoyable trip to the city. The insert listed hotels in

all five boroughs with their daily rates for single and double rooms, information
designed, perhaps, to make sure that black tourists were not charged more for their rooms
than other tourists. The list included Howard Johnson’s, the Statler Hilton, and Marriott
among other mainstream hotels. Chain hotels did not have a single national policy
regarding integration. In some states chain hotels welcomed African American guests in
the 1960s, but the same chain hotels in other states turned them away. Green Book maps
of the fairgrounds displayed the location of the exhibitions in relationship to the major
highways that brought motorists. A description of inexpensive places to eat while
visiting the fair, reprinted from Look Magazine, suggested international cuisines and, like
the articles in the Green Book, encouraged readers to experience the cultures of far away
people and places.

The Green Book staff encouraged readers to feel comfortable traveling and to take
to the road and the air. Integrated with the state listings were lodgings in other countries
in this hemisphere—Canada and Mexico, the Caribbean, Bermuda, and the Virgin
Islands. Chief writer Novera Dashiell admitted that she was the only member of the
Green Book staff still “earthbound,” but she highly recommended that her readers try air
travel for a far away vacation or for a distant business appointment. Dashiell also
confirmed the popular belief that France welcomed black Americans. “We know a
number of our race who have a long standing love affair with the tempestuous city of
Paris,” she wrote. “Their hearts have lingered there long after they have returned
home.”

By the 1960s, extensive listings for both Europe and Africa seduced Green

---

44 “The Project Fun,” Green Book Guide for Travel and Vacations, (New York: Victor Green,
Inc.,1962) 4-5.
Book readers. Travel outside of the United States increased in popularity in the 1960s and provided a respite from American racism for middle class blacks. In many countries outside of the United States black travelers found a tourist industry receptive to their visits. They could travel without fear and be treated with courtesy.

Ernest Dunbar, a black writer and photographer for Look Magazine and frequent international traveler, suggested that going abroad enabled middle class black Americans to relieve the relentless psychological pressure that racism caused. Outside the United States Dunbar found policemen friendly and helpful. Unlike law enforcement officers in the United States, one might find white policemen smiling and saying hello when you walked down a European street. “[In the United States] we travel to survive,” Dunbar argued. Describing the pleasures he derived from vacationing in Europe, he explained, “[a]way from the pressures and inanities of the racial struggle in this country, we pull together our shredded psychic garments and gird ourselves for another round or two.”

Travel outside of the United States recharged black Americans’ batteries for the struggles they faced when they came home.

Travel to Africa provided a way to reclaim a heritage lost to slavery and to enable black travelers to redefine themselves both as middle class travelers and as African Americans. In addition to being an opportunity for self-discovery, travel to the African continent provided a chance for self-education. By understanding their past African Americans could understand the present. “The fact is that the Negro must study his past, grade by grade and level by level, as do those of other races,” said travel writer Albert

Brooks. “This is so, not because of the understanding of the importance of a dead past, but because the understanding of the cause and effect relationships involved in past problems helps solve today’s problems.”

The *Green Book* of the 1960s revealed the broad expansion of opportunities available to black travelers over the course of the Guide’s life—a publication run that seems to have ended in 1966, two years after the passage of major civil rights legislation made segregation in public accommodations illegal. Leading up to this legislation, the participation of white liberals in the Civil Rights Movement in the South and the outrage of northern whites who viewed news footage of peaceful demonstrators being attacked by dogs or knocked down by torrents of water from fire hoses moved civil rights into the American mainstream. In this political climate the *Green Book* openly supported the Movement and embraced activism. In a regular feature called “Your Rights, Briefly Speaking,” *Green Book* writers listed anti-Jim Crow statutes. The state-by-state list explained the laws prohibiting discrimination and specified the fines and punishments that could be imposed for violations. The descriptions of the violations suggest that readers were encouraged to take direct action: to file lawsuits, to seek monetary damages against the wrongful action, and to demonstrate. In Nebraska, for example, violators of the anti-discrimination laws faced criminal prosecution through court proceedings. In California, plaintiffs against discrimination in recreational facilities required plaintiffs to sue in civil court for damages plus $250. A photograph of five black United States Congressmen accompanied the *Green Book* article and reminded readers of the progress

---

46 Brooks, “So You Like to Travel,” 201.
toward equal rights that had been made so far. The author of the text accompanying the photograph commented that the Negro was “only demanding what everyone else wants. . . what is guaranteed all citizens by the Constitution of the United States.” Unlike earlier *Green Book* articles that spoke of travel as a fairly passive method of moving civil rights forward, this author defended more direct action and encouraged “sit-ins, kneel-ins, freedom rides,” demonstrations, and court actions to achieve expanded public accommodations for all. No longer taking refuge in euphemisms that vaguely described the “humiliation” and “aggravation” felt by black travelers, the rhetoric in the 1960s addressed the legal basis for equal rights and made the case for vigorous political action. The 1960 *Green Book* included another indicator of a more direct and aggressive attitude toward civil rights. A full-page photograph of C.E. Ware, the African American proprietor of Ware’s Super Market in Memphis, Tennessee, shows Ware proudly shaking hands with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dr. Ralph Abernathy. The storeowner consciously tied himself and his business to King despite the repercussions that such associations with civil rights leaders could have on black businessmen. Even in the 1950s many middle class owners of black lodging establishments like A.G. Gaston, the owner of Gaston’s Motel in Birmingham, Alabama, had opened their businesses to civil rights workers, including high profile leaders like King.  

---

48 Gaston was a conservative businessman and Booker T. Washington supporter, who believed in gradual desegregation. He believed that African Americans could move forward only through economic means, and he started any number of successful businesses. He used his autobiography as a way to promote his philosophy of self-help and education to children. After seeing children rolled down the street by fire hoses during a peaceful civil rights demonstration Gaston became more involved in the Movement. In addition to King many other Civil Rights workers stayed at Gaston’s Motel. The courageous men and women who were willing to house civil rights workers provided a tremendous service to the Movement, and they placed themselves in jeopardy. In addition to King, Jazz singer Al Hibbler is known to have stayed at Gaston’s. *The Green Book* includes Gaston’s as well as the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, where King was murdered, among
Birmingham headquarters for King and for the Movement. In addition to such public support, clandestine operations also supported the Civil Rights Movement. Georgia Gilmore, who ran a secret kitchen in Montgomery, Alabama, used her well-known cooking skills to raise money for the Movement and to cook for its participants in her home. As the founder of a group called the “Club from Nowhere,” she and a group of women from Montgomery baked pies, cakes, and cookies to raise money to support the bus boycott. Word of mouth brought travelers to her dining room although Gilmore’s accommodations were not listed in the *Green Book* or other travel guides because of the secret nature of her business. The money Gilmore and the other Montgomery women earned helped purchase the station wagons and gasoline that transported people to work during the bus boycott. Georgia Gilmore also operated a small restaurant for civil rights workers in her home. Gaston, Gilmore, and other business owners, far from the conservative, reticent stereotype of the black middle class, provided shelter and food for Movement participants at their peril. On May 11, 1963 domestic terrorists bombed the A. G Gaston Motel and Gaston’s home.  

---


Figure 5:8 As the Civil Rights Movement heated up in the 1960s, the *Green Book* supported the black freedom struggle in a more open and forthright manner with advertisements like this one that included prominent Movement leaders. Collection of the author
Figure 2:9 Spectators gather shortly after the bombing of the A.G. Gaston Motel in Birmingham. Unknown assailants bombed the building on May 11, 1963 to frighten the growing number of people demonstrating against segregation in the city. The violent nature of resistance to civil rights earned the city the nickname, “Bombingham.” On September 15, Addie Mae Collins, 14, Carole Robertson, 14, Cynthia Wesley, 14 and Denise McNair, 11 died in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Courtesy Birmingham News Archive

From its founding in 1936, the *Negro Motorist Green Book* advocated civil rights by supporting the Negro traveler and finding ways for black Americans to “vacation without aggravation” in the segregated United States. In an article titled, “Janus,” for the Roman god of open doors, writer Novera Dashiell praised 1960 as a year of great accomplishment for black people worldwide as a result of direct political action and the drive for independence on the continent of Africa. “Our young people with their successful sit-in demonstrations have prodded the older generation to greater effort in the
struggle for civic dignity” she wrote.\textsuperscript{51} The \textit{Green Book} staff perceived of themselves as activists and tied their work for black motorists to the work of such institutions as the Urban League, the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Like these groups, the \textit{Green Book} staff viewed themselves as actively “fighting for minority rights” by facilitating free movement through the country.\textsuperscript{52}

In 1962 Harlem businessman Langley Waller and \textit{Amsterdam News} cartoonist, Melvin Tapley purchased the \textit{Green Book}. Although it continued to bear the name of Victor Green, the contents of the guide reflected changes brought to it by the new publishers. The addition of line drawings and cartoons by Tapley constituted one of the most striking changes. Tapley, one of the leading cartoonists of the black press, drew for the \textit{New York Amsterdam News} newspaper from the 1940s until he retired in the late 1990s. Although the drawings are signed “Heritage Features,” they are in Tapley’s style. He was associated with the \textit{Green Book} before his purchase of the business and is listed as the cover illustrator of the 1959 edition.\textsuperscript{53} The \textit{Green Book} of Tapley’s era included a consciously didactic feature called “Green-Book’s History-Makers,” highlighting little known black American heroes. “One of the founders of Denver, Colorado,” black hunter and trapper Jim Beckwourth, was drawn in his fringed shirt. Beckwourth, who lived with the Crow Indians for many years, trapped furs in the Rocky Mountains and

mined gold in California, embodied the American adventurer. Another of Tapley’s “history-makers,” William Leidesdorff, a seaman from St. Croix, earned an artist’s profile for launching the first steamboat in San Francisco and building the city’s first hotel. Born in 1810 to a Jewish Danish sugar planter and a “Mulatto” woman from St. Croix, Leidesdorff also helped to found the first schools in San Francisco and is known through his business ventures as the nation’s first black millionaire. Beckwourth and Leidesdorff were perfect exemplars of the Green Book’s message that encouraged readers to take risks and travel across the country.

Subtly reflecting the changing nature of the travel and tourism market and the lessening of racism discrimination in public accommodations, the Negro Traveler’s Green Book changed to the Traveler’s Green Book in 1961 and to the Green Book Guide for Travel and Vacations in 1962. New owners Tapley and Waller added the word “International” to the title in 1963. In the 1960s African American travelers’ guides hoped to appeal to international as well as American travelers and to attract liberal white Americans sympathetic to the Civil Rights Movement and anxious to spend their travel dollars on hotels that did not discriminate. The new names told potential buyers that the book now suited a broader and integrated audience.

African American entrepreneurs launched more than a dozen black travel guides between 1930 and the 1960s, indicating the demand for these specialized books. Few of

these publications lasted more than a few issues. Only the Negro Motorist Green Book generated sufficient support to continue in operation for thirty years. Victor Green’s ability to secure oil company support, to attract the attention of interested white readers, and to distribute the Green Book in outlets from Gimbels Department Store in New York to Esso gas stations throughout the country, led to his success. Black travelers needed navigational tools that provided more information than maps; race-specific guidebooks helped to provide them with navigational tools and with the ability to travel with greater confidence. At the same time the Green Book provided the information needed to help African Americans maintain their class identity and to avoid embarrassing racial encounters by giving them lists of suitable places to stay. Written in a moderate, appealing tone and language, and stressing the importance of the freedom to travel, Victor and Alma Green created a publication that bridged the racial divide and spoke both to black Americans and to the sympathetic white Americans they needed to make the travel guide financially viable.
Chapter Six
The Language of the *Green Book*

"In spite of emancipation Negroes still feel it necessary to conceal their thoughts from white people."

The inaugural *Green Book* published in 1937 stated its purpose as compiling “facts and information connected with motoring, which the Negro Motorist can use and depend upon.” The authors did not demand equal rights or exhort the traveling African American public to force themselves on public accommodations where they were not wanted. The guide did not promote boycotts or civil disobedience to end segregation in travel accommodations. Indeed, the Green Book made almost no mention of the discrimination black travelers faced. Although the *Green Book* was established because of prejudice, the language of the *Green Book* relating to race and civil rights was tempered, gentle, sometimes vague, but always subtle, polite, and well reasoned. The writers avoided inflammatory polemics. Although each annual *Green Book* appeared to include no politics, these books were nonetheless intensely political documents, very carefully worded and illustrated to serve the specific needs of black readers, while also taking into consideration the sensibilities of white readers and financial supporters. The language of this simple, promotional travel guide, offered readers, like other pieces of writing in the African American literary tradition, a coded rhetoric that was understood in one way by African Americans and in another way by white readers. “Today, our thousands of travelers, if they be thoughtful enough to arm themselves with a Green Book, may free themselves of a lot of worry and inconvenience as they plan a trip.”
commented James Jackson in the Green Book.\(^1\) To black readers Jackson knowingly
described his approach to avoiding discrimination on the road. To white readers he
recommended a method of trip planning.

Little documentary evidence exists about New Yorker Victor H. Green or about
the *Negro Motorist’s Green Book* that Green and his staff produced in Harlem and later
in an office in Leonia, New Jersey. But the words of the annual editions of the *Green
Books* offer opportunities for a rhetorical analysis that provides clues to Green’s
intentions and the approach of the black middle class to civil rights. This rhetorical
analysis provides an opportunity to understand the authors’ motives and to decipher the
needs of the readership.\(^2\) Green’s prudently worded rhetoric effectively communicated
multiple messages. White readers heard sophisticated language written by educated and
accommodating middle class Negroes.\(^3\) The words indicated that the writers approved of
finding constructive, non-violent, and collaborative ways to address concerns about the
dangers of travel and segregated travel accommodations for black Americans throughout
the country. African American readers understood the moderate voice of the *Green Book*
as expressive of the black middle class and as necessary for any publication that required
white support or came under white scrutiny. (“It has been our idea to give the Negro
traveler information that will keep him from running into difficulties [and]

---

\(^2\) Edward P.J. Corbett, *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works*, (New York: Oxford University
\(^3\) A small and somewhat diverse group of white readers included white liberals who were
encouraged to read the book by urban publications, Standard Oil executives interested in
marketing their product to black customers, and the owners of Esso gas stations who distributed
the *Green Book* to black customers.
embarrassments, and to make his trips more enjoyable.”

But Green’s black readers also perceived of the *Green Book* and other similar black travel guides as activist publications that promoted African American tourism and facilitated travel into hostile territory. (“History shows the rewards gained when a race made its own struggle against the ebb and flow of local and national passions. No one esteems freedom given or sought without it being earned.”) The language of the *Green Books* made readers responsible for interpreting the carefully chosen words according to their own needs and enabled Green’s business to be successful.

A long history of speaking and writing with multiple intents, with hidden meanings or coded language, and with discretion exists among African Americans. Black writers knew that white readers might carefully scrutinize each word that they wrote. Because white readers might be eavesdropping, African American writers painstakingly constructed their narratives to address the needs of black readers while making the strongest possible case for equal rights to white readers. The basis of the case for equal rights was self-evident to African Americans. To gain the broad support of white readers, however, the case for civil rights needed to be phrased in ways that did not push ideas that might frighten whites. Many black American writers, both literary and popular, wrote to persuade and by persuading without antagonizing, to improve the lot of all African Americans.

---

The testimony of slaves collected for the Works Projects Administration (WPA) during the Depression represents an early twentieth century example of coded black language. Historians and folklorists have been deciphering these stories for more than fifty years. The formerly enslaved African Americans equivocated about their experiences in servitude, not sure whether they could trust their interviewers. Many refused to talk about difficult topics like the cruelty of their masters or their attitudes toward slavery. Some intentionally could not remember the events of their slave past or moderated their comments in an attempt to please or appease the questioner. Often, freed African Americans omitted anti-white sentiments from their comments. Why should the former slaves trust interviewers who looked and acted like their former oppressors? What were the interviewers’ motives in asking questions? In the introduction to Lay My Burden Down, a published volume of WPA slave narratives, Jerrold Hirsch noted that the interviewers “worked within the conventions of the plantation tradition familiar to them through folklore, literature, and popular culture. They thus treated their black informants as inferior beings who were content with their lives as slaves.”\(^6\) The former slaves responded by providing guarded answers. Analysis of these narratives revealed black rhetoric as a strategy for dealing with a powerful dominant white culture.\(^7\) Many African Americans censored their speech and their writing to protect themselves and to make

---


their words conform to their ideas of what whites wanted to hear. Conversely, their messages had to be those that whites could hear and accept coming from a black person; they needed to reject violence and endorse moderation. African American journalist George Schuyler penned instructions to black writers about the writing he deemed appropriate for publication in the Negro press. “Nothing will be permitted that is likely to engender ill feelings between blacks and whites. The color problem is bad enough without adding any fuel to the fire.”

African Americans knew that the white mainstream noticed their writings and speeches.

Robert Russa Moton (1867-1940), an educator and college president, provided an explanation for coded narratives. In 1929 Moton described the oblique language used by black writers as a survival mechanism:

In spite of emancipation Negroes still feel it necessary to conceal their thoughts from white people. In speech and in manner they convey the impressions of concurrence and contentment when at heart they feel quite otherwise. In these recent days the psychologists have come to call this a “defense mechanism,” and some are sure that it is the only thing that enables the Negro to survive in his contact with the white man. Negroes are sometimes warned, even now, that they dare not manifest any resentment toward mistreatment; that the safest policy to pursue is to acquiesce in the judgment of white people who have manifested a friendly attitude toward them and appeal to their consciences for the redressing of wrongs and correction of abuses. Small wonder that the Negro is so generally secretive.

The many white readers who reviewed W.E. B. DuBois’ provocative and thoughtful 1920 compilation of essays, Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil, largely misunderstood it. White readers largely denounced Du Bois as a man with “a fanatical

---

mind, filled with a deep longing to avenge humiliation and injustice,” and as full of “race
hatred.” Even many of the author’s liberal allies found his essays too strongly worded
and too critical of white people.\textsuperscript{10} Particularly frightening to white readers were DuBois’
predictions of a coming race war resulting from the treatment of the darker races.
DuBois received his share of criticism from other black intellectuals and historians as
well—most within the black middle class. Carter Woodson somewhat dismissively
described DuBois as a “poet,” who did not understand the “scientific treatment” of the
race problem, and others criticized his comfortable middle class, light-skinned
perspective. But none of his African American critics saw him as the kind of race hater
or uncompromising extremist that the white press depicted. Indeed, Darkwater’s original
publisher, Harcourt, Brace and Howe, was astonished to discover the numbers of orders
that they received for the book from all over the country from ordinary working class
black men and women, many from the segregated South, blacks who embraced the
opportunity to read a provocative volume that praised the race and denounced racism.\textsuperscript{11}
Black people and white people heard and interpreted the words used to discuss race
differently.

Scholars, including Lawrence Levine, Herbert Aptheker, and Eugene Genovese
among others, have written about the way that African slaves responded to their condition
through concealed forms of resistance and cultural preservation. While appearing to be

\textsuperscript{10} Historian Manning Marable describes the reception of Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil
(New York: Dover, 1999) v-viii.; DuBois biographer David Levering Lewis discusses reactions
to the book by both blacks and whites in David Levering Lewis, W.E.B. DuBois: the Fight for
cowed and compliant, they actually thwarted the masters’ wishes by working slowly, breaking tools, and maintaining a rich oral tradition.\textsuperscript{12} Enslaved Africans opposed slavery without resorting to rebellion and without the knowledge of slave owners. Robin Kelley’s research brought the study of such “hidden transcripts” into the twentieth century by examining resistance among black working-class southerners. Such actions as intentionally jostling whites on buses, engaging in fist fights with bus drivers, stealing cigarettes, or breaking equipment on the assembly line constituted resistance that was not necessarily recognized as protest against racism. Working class resistance described by Kelley lacked the decorum of the black middle class. For this group, well-mannered resistance might involve writing letters of complaint, participating in legal action, supporting civil rights organizations, working for the education and uplift of the race, boycotting businesses and products, supporting the freedom to travel throughout the country, or any number of similar actions. \textit{The Green Book} authors approached their audiences with the thoughtfulness urged by George Schuyler (“Nothing will be permitted that is likely to engender ill feelings between blacks and whites”), the caution exercised by the former slaves in the WPA interviews, and the well-mannered dignity of the black middle class. As the \textit{Negro Motorist Green Book} noted, the black middle class wanted to “vacation without aggravation,” hoping to protect themselves and particularly their children from ugly, racist encounters.\textsuperscript{13} “Perhaps they were afraid they would sound ungrateful,” commented \textit{Look} Magazine senior editor Ernest Dunbar in his open letter to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] This tagline, “vacation without aggravation” appeared on several issues of \textit{the Green Book} including 1963-63 and 1965-66.
\end{footnotes}
President Johnson about travel as a black man in the United States. “That fear is one of our characteristic traits,” Dunbar said of the black middle class. Green’s writers also had an innate understanding of the way that American business worked. They knew that black people needed white allies if they were to succeed in a national consumer society. They chose not to offend their white allies because they wanted continued support for the Green Book’s ultimate goals of integration and an end to segregation.

Victor Green’s Green Book abided by the traditional African American aphorism, “Got one mind for white folk to see/ Nother I know that is me.” The Negro Motorist’s Green Book relied on the largesse of mainstream national white corporations and government agencies to disseminate the product widely to black readers. These corporate and government interests balanced concerns for their African American audience and their need to please their constituents among the large and powerful white segregationist South. Green’s success as a businessman was not in his hands alone.

The Green Book’s primary readership consisted of African Americans with the affluence and time to travel. These members of the black middle class generally bent over backwards to be unassertive, accommodating, and dignified. For them, modest behavior demonstrated their worthiness of class status, particularly to white observers.

---


Writers as diverse as Charlotte Hawkins Brown, who wrote an etiquette book for girls in the 1940s, and Velena Elizabeth Minor, who wrote an article in *The Negro Traveler* about proper deportment while traveling, demonstrated the link between class and behavior. Hawkins referred to polite behavior as offering the “possibility of achieving nobler ends for a minority group.”¹⁶ Minor’s very specific dos and don’ts above all encouraged her readers to always be “as inconspicuous as possible.”¹⁷

In addition to middle class African Americans interested in travel, white American liberals with an interest in African Americans also read the *Green Book*. This group of urbanites took an increasing interest in the guidebook as they became more interested in the black freedom struggle. An article appearing in New York’s liberal newspaper, *PM Daily*, indicates that the *Green Book* piqued the curiosity of some white readers in New York.¹⁸ (“Year after year it [the Green Book] grew until 1941 “PM” one of New York’s great white newspapers found out about it.”)¹⁹ Still other white readers had larger agendas. Green forged corporate and government partnerships to circulate the *Green Book* nationwide. His partners, including oil companies and tourist bureaus, disseminated the guide to court the African American consumer market.

To the black community, the *Green Book*’s language communicated its enthusiasm for travel and offered encouragement to travel. The volume stated its

---

¹⁶ Charlotte Hawkins Brown, *The Correct Thing to Do, To Say, To Wear*, Published by the author, (Sedalia, North Carolina, 1940) 68.
¹⁷ Valena Elizabeth Minor, “The Happy Traveler is a Planner,” *The Negro Traveler*, (New York: Traveler’s Research Publishing Co., Inc. 1945) vol. 1 no.6, p. 21
intention to keep readers safe during their journeys and to help locate lodgings for either business or pleasure. The message stated the right of black readers and motorists to move freely from place to place and the role that travel played in helping to end Jim Crow practices. Quoting Mark Twain, the cover of the 1949 Green Book noted, without comment, that “travel is fatal to prejudice.”20 Like other African American travel guides, the Green Book’s writers believed in ending segregation in public accommodations by persuading more and more members of the worthy and well behaved black middle class to take to the highways—integration through positive saturation. “There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published,” commented Green. “That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment.”21 By making travel for black Americans easier, the Green Book actively supported an end to Jim Crow America.

At the same time that the Negro Motorist’s Green Book was perceived by black Americans as a vehicle supporting of the rights of travelers, it might also be interpreted by white readers as a service that maintained the status quo. To white readers, the book appeared to be a moderate voice providing a necessary service to the black public traveling in Jim Crow America. The guide did not harp on civil rights, but focused on the black motorists’ need to find hotel rooms, almost all of which were in black neighborhoods across the country. The vast majority of the book’s listings described segregated tourist homes, hotels, guesthouses, and rooms at colored YMCAs that would

accept “Negro” travelers as guests. The mild language of the _Green Book_ would
certainly not offend most white readers. One article in the _Green Book_ simply described
Jim Crow in the nation’s overnight accommodations, and noted that “for some travelers.
the facilities of many of these places [mainstream hotels] are not available, even though
they may have the price.”

It did not protest the injustice; it did slyly mention the
existence of a respectable and prosperous black middle class. The juxtaposition exposes
the absurdity of segregation.

White Americans could take no offense at the rhetoric of the Green Book. The Green
Book’s rhetoric could be considered a benefit to the white community by keeping African
American travelers controlled within segregated black neighborhoods when they traveled.
They would not have to stop and ask for accommodations at white hotels if they knew
how to find black hotels. The information in the _Green Book_ also kept African
Americans from venturing too far off the inter-state highways into white spaces. The
guide helped to identify and locate the black sections of town, perhaps even slowing
down the pace of desegregation. From the point of view of those anxious to avoid a
national racial confrontation between those who supported segregation and those who
opposed it, the _Green Book_ demonstrated the type of moderate behavior that made white
Americans feel comfortable.

Both economic and practical reasons made the coded language of the _Negro
Motorist’s Green Book_ necessary to accommodate the very different groups of readers
who used it. The primary audiences—African American families on vacation, corporate

---

executives traveling for business, traveling musicians, tired after a late performance and looking for a bed for the night—needed to find hotels, motels, barbershops, beauty parlors, restaurants, and other personal services easily. The state-by-state and town-by-town listings of public accommodations and advertisements for hotels satisfied this audience’s immediate requirements. The other users of the Green Book were advertisers. Corporate interests supported the Green Book in an attempt to promote their products within the national black community. The success of marketing their products depended on the success of the guide.

Enlightened self-interest led Standard Oil and later Humble Oil to distribute the Green Book.23 Favor within the black community, these corporations believed, would lead to increased sales of gasoline and perhaps the corporations’ ability to capture the “Negro” market. While many companies simply ignored this constituency, preferring to believe that black people could be kept as a permanent underclass, others actively looked for ways to reach African American consumers. Beginning in the 1940s, some American companies recognized the growing wealth of the black middle class. Advertising in black newspapers and on radio programs that played “race” music were the most common approaches to this new demographic. African American market researcher David J. Sullivan published a variety of articles in the 1940s aimed at encouraging white businesses to reach out to black consumers. Sullivan, the most prominent African American marketing professional in this period, recommended ways to appeal to black

23 John D. Rockefeller, a devout Baptist and founder of Standard Oil, was a well-known supporter of African American causes. He founded historically black Spelman College, and named it with his wife’s maiden name. At the same time that Rockefeller supported the Green Book and Spelman College he was also in the process of restoring Colonial Williamsburg. One of Williamsburg’s ancillary businesses was the Williamsburg Inn, a segregated hotel.
customers sensitively and successfully. His recommendations suggest the depth of American and corporate obliviousness about the American black community. Racism was so much a part of everyday life and custom that Sullivan had to inform his white readers not to use such insulting words as picaninny, coon, shine, and darky. An article entitled “Don’t Do This—If You Want to Sell Your Products to Negroes” in Sales Management Magazine told corporate advertisers that they had to avoid “exaggerating Negro features” and should treat black people with respect. “ Refrain from referring to every black man as ‘George,’ ” and avoid using the Uncle Mose and Aunt Jemima stereotypes, Sullivan cautioned. The article also recommended that white people forgo the use of black face makeup and use real “brown skinned” people in advertisements rather than white people in black-face. Sullivan predicted that by 1944 the aggregate income of the nation’s almost thirteen million black Americans would rise to $10,500,000,000. If businesses wished to attract a large black clientele they would have to avoid racism advertisements.

Standard Oil was among the earliest, although not the only, corporation to exploit the growing African American market by hiring “Negro” marketers to direct advertising aimed at the black community. The relationship of expedience between the African American marketers at Standard Oil and the publishers of the Green Book is evident throughout the volumes. Standard Oil, the parent company of Esso gasoline and oil products appears frequently in the Green Book and Esso gas stations welcomed black

24 David Sullivan, "Don't Do This--if You Want to Sell Your Products to Negroes!," Sales Management 52 (1943): 48.
motorists. Although advertisements did not explicitly state support of the black freedom struggle, support is implied by the encouragement to travel freely. The 1953 edition of the guide includes a photograph that visually realized African American goals of integration. The annual dinner in the dining room of the Esso building at New York’s Radio City shows a group of black people and white people dining cordially together in a public place.

Esso’s “Negro Marketers” James A. Jackson and Wendell P. Alston wrote regular feature articles in the Green Book that encouraged readers to buy the guide annually and also to purchase Esso products. The articles always ended with not so subtle advertising urging African Americans to enjoy “Happy Motoring” with Esso. Esso actively supported the rising tide of prosperity among black Americans through the corporation’s willingness to sell franchises to black entrepreneurs when few others would do so. Standard Oil, unlike other large oil companies, contributed to black financial success and bolstered the black middle class through their financial support. “Here are some of the nearly Two Hundred Esso Stations operated by Negro managers and owners,” proudly commented the 1953 guide. Photographs of large, prosperous, clean Esso gas stations owned by black franchise owners provided proof of Esso’s economic support of the race. Mrs. Crane of North Carolina explained how ownership of her Esso station helped her to educate two sons and build a beautiful house across the street from her business.26

Standard Oil’s Esso gas stations owned by African Americans or by willing white franchise owners distributed free copies of the *Green Book* to their black customers. On some editions, the back cover of the book was personalized with the name and address of the station, making it a promotional piece and the perfect companion to the free road maps that Esso also distributed. The *Green Book’s* preference for Standard Oil’s Esso distributors implies that black motorists were always welcome at their service stations, but in fact hospitality varied widely across the country and reflected the racial attitudes of station owners. Some African Americans perceived Esso as being less discriminatory than other stations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Esso stations that sold gasoline to black patrons and repaired their cars also permitted them to use the rest rooms. Morris Johnson remembered stopping at various Esso stations and finding them welcoming. “I guess we started stopping there and you know, everything was quite friendly…Matter of fact, we could use the bathroom.”

Sylvester Hollis’ family had very specific personal guidelines when they traveled based on their vacation experiences in the 1950s and 1960s. They frequented a Texaco station owned by “A black guy in our neighborhood,” but when traveling they didn’t use Texaco gas because the stations were not welcoming. Citgo stations would not permit African Americans in their bathrooms, according to Hollis, and hung Jim Crow signs on the door. He remembered a Phillips 66 station that would sell you gas, but “then you put the money on a table. They wouldn’t take it from your hand. They wouldn’t touch you. But, they would touch your money after you left.” Hollis found Esso stations the most welcoming and preferred to stop there. National market research surveys support the anecdotal evidence and indicate a preference for Esso gasoline particularly on the east coast where Standard Oil was headquartered. In

---

northern New Jersey almost sixty-seven percent of African America drivers preferred Esso gas and in Boston fifty percent of black drivers stopped at Esso stations. *The Green Book* included many photographs of gas stations that welcomed black customers; many of them sold Esso gasoline. Black New Yorkers frequented a larger variety of station franchises, but the greatest number of drivers still preferred to stop at Esso stations.\(^{28}\)

Although not all of the gas stations listed in the *Green Book* were affiliated with Standard Oil, many photographs proudly included the company’s Esso logo in their display advertisements.

---

Figure 6:1 While other gas stations were listed in the *Green Book* there was a preference for Esso stations believed by many African Americans’ to be most welcoming to black travelers. Collection of the Author

While Esso cultivated the black community, the company also worked to keep and expand their white customer base. Illustrations on road maps from the 1920s to the 1960s, distributed to all Esso customers, never included African Americans in their images of travelers. At the same time that black-owned service stations circulated the *Green Book* to their customers, Esso also produced a promotional cookbook to give away
to white customers that was unlikely to appeal to black customers. *Aunt Julia’s Cookbook for Happy Eating* was a small thirty-two-page booklet of recipes interspersed with household cleaning hints and “some good rules of the road to remember.” Like the Green Book, *Aunt Julia’s Cookbook* provided gas station owners with a blank square on the front cover to personalize the pamphlet with the station’s imprint. The cookbook’s frontispiece featured two bandana clad African American women—Aunt Julia and Aunt Leola, in their aprons, ready to prepare their favorite foods. Recipes included Brunswick stew, biscuits, hoe cakes, dumplings, “Old Virginia Spoon Bread,” and other rural favorites. The two women on the cover associated black women with service, cooking, and the old South. Esso appeared to be an enlightened corporation to black readers of the *Green Book* and a company that supported traditional American values to white readers of *Aunt Julia’s Cookbook*. The corporation that advertised its support of black business also pandered to the popular stereotype of black women as southern mammies.
Figure 6:2 The cover of Aunt Julia’s Cookbook included a space for each of its Esso gas stations to identify themselves. Aunt Julia’s cookbook became a personal and potentially permanent advertisement that would reside in the home as a constant reminder of the oil company. Esso distributed this cookbook at the same time that they also circulated Victor Green’s travel guide. Standard Oil, Esso’s parent company courted African Americans with one message and demeaned them with another. Collection of the author
Figure 6:3 The inside front cover of the Esso Cookbook included this photograph of "Aunt Julia" and "Aunt Leola." The term "Aunt," when used by whites to refer to black women, was a pejorative term that degraded black women. The two cooks appear in bandanas much like the mammys of the old South from which the recipes were allegedly drawn. Although advertisements in the cookbook include airplanes and automobiles, the black women continue to be depicted, even by a company that might be considered progressive, as slave characters of the nineteenth century. Collection of the author
Gaining a broad sponsorship audience from Standard Oil and Humble Oil for national distribution of the guide enabled Victor Green to keep his publication afloat from 1936 through 1966 with a small staff and limited distribution network. A variety of other organizations also saw the value of reaching out to an African American clientele. In addition to the oil companies, Green also cultivated the American Automobile Association and the United States Travel Bureau and built alliances with “travel bureaus, bus and airlines, the armed forces and thousands of subscribers who depend on its [the Green Book’s] useful travel references.” The United States Travel Bureau was a federal agency established as part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to promote domestic travel to help to bring the nation out of the depression. Green worked closely with the United States Travel Bureau to expand knowledge of the Green Book and to bring the imprimatur of the federal government to his publication. Not only was the Bureau an important source of publicity, but it became one of Green’s sources for identifying hotels, tourist homes, and gas stations in the far corners of the country. “Through the courtesy of the United States Travel Bureau, of which Mr. Chas. A.R. MacDowell was the collaborator on Negro Affairs,” Green wrote, “more valuable information was secured.” “With the two working together, this guide contained the best ideas of the Negro traveler.” Many guides failed; only the small number of African American travel guides that managed to secure wide distribution, included broad listings, and appealed to both a white and a black audience managed to survive beyond a year or two.

To walk the line between black and white readers, *The Negro Motorist’s Green Book* was filled with slogans and tag lines, cleverly coded, for black readers. “Carry your *Green Book* with you. You might need it,” the book cryptically warned. “You might need it” referred as much to the dangers imbedded in segregated society as it did to the universal needs of travelers for mechanical assistance, food, and lodging. African Americans understood the unwritten message. If you are stuck along the road *and you are an African American* the Green Book will provide a place for you to stay or to get your car fixed. It offered resources in an emergency. “Use it on your next trip. Use it when you are out for a ride,” suggested the 1939 *Green Book*. Black motorists never knew when they might encounter a dangerous situation. Articles in the *Green Book* usually avoided mention of race, but still conveyed the message to African Americans that the guide was an indispensable tool against racism. Early editions in the 1930s and 1940s included a short paragraph explaining that the *Green Book* was designed to keep the Negro traveler, “from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trips more enjoyable.”

A succinct history of the publication let readers know that the *Green Book* had been changed and improved every year since its inception and explained that a history of collaboration with a variety of groups made it a publication of quality. Annual updates provided travelers with new options for their vacations. Countries were gradually added to the listings and accommodations were kept current. Later editions of the *Green Book* in the 1960s did not even mention the original purpose, but focused instead on including as many advertisements and business listings as possible. By this time, the guide was a
well-established, well-known publication. Green’s staff no longer needed to explain its purposes. It was simply understood within the black community that they needed such a guide in a country where Jim Crow remained the legal and customary law of the land.

The language of the Green Book was decidedly middle class; its formal tone demonstrated to both its black and white audiences the way that African Americans had moved into the ranks of the nation’s professional classes. Writing in the 1949 Green Book, Esso marketer, Wendell Alston, omitted any mention of families on vacation among the black traveling public and focused instead on describing black travelers by their work. Alston’s list of African Americans on the road included “top ranking orchestras and minor ones, concert singers and various musical organizations. . . students and teachers and many others in the field of education,” and businessmen working for black enterprises and white corporations and conventioneers. The book stressed the sophistication and refinement of black writers and their assumption of similar sensibilities among their readers. To indicate their gentility writers used euphemisms to speak of the racism encountered while traveling, rather than disparaging race relations in the country. Phrases such as “vacation without aggravation” and “an haphazard vacation is no fun” offered the mildest criticism of Jim Crow accommodations. Later editions expressed refinement in other ways such as describing appropriate travel clothing (“For evenings in the tropics, a stole of fabric or wool, colder regions . . . the fur of your choice.”31) or touting the attributes of various luxury hotels, resorts, golf and country clubs that served African Americans.

Only a few images appear in the *Green Book*, but the guides’ visual presentation reinforces its middle class message. The covers of the early editions in the 1930s and 1940s include only narrative information describing the services offered by the guide. Some of the brief articles on travel destinations include evocative photographs to encourage potential visitors. In late editions, the cover illustrations and advertisements construct a visual language of worthiness and respectability. Photographs of African American hotel or restaurant owners provided the opportunity to these people to present themselves as individuals worthy of respect rather than as the African American stereotypes depicted in popular advertisements. Formal photographic portraits of the stone-faced owner of the Amigo Motel and Café in Tucumcari, New Mexico offered guests an air-conditioned “home beside the road” with courtesy, comfort, and convenience; a decidedly less corporate and more friendly Tom Simpkins of the Mountain Laurel Motel and Café in Warrenville, South Carolina told perspective visitors that an activity filled summer of swimming and fishing was available at “a resort to be remembered!!” Both men, although using different approaches, presented themselves as professional, individual, competent, and middle class. They inspired confidence in those making the decision to travel whether giving the impression of no nonsense perfection or courteous and welcoming hospitality. Also helping to construct the image of middle class propriety were casual pictures of James A. Jackson and Wendell P. Alston, Esso’s “Negro marketers.” In addition to attracting other corporate executives to the *Green Book*, the articles and photographs of the Standard Oil staff added to the long list of respectable black patrons that also included fraternal and community organizations.

---

32 Green, (1959) 51, 60.
The *Green Book*’s most repeated image—perhaps its signature image—depicted a smiling middle class couple walking to their car. This image appeared on the cover of the 1949 edition of the *Green Book* and also as a long-standing logo on the stationery for the company. The couple in the drawing may be off on a road trip or headed to the airport for an international flight. The surroundings identify the two as suburban homeowners. They live in a tidy neighborhood framed by shade trees and orderly houses. The man, attired in a double-breasted suit and dress shoes, carries a monogrammed suitcase. The artist signed the drawing on the suitcase creating the monogram. The woman wearing a stylish dress and fashionable open toed, high-heels looks out around her tall husband’s broad shoulders. Both of them smile at the viewer. The couple presents themselves as conservative and respectable. Members of the black middle class looking at this image would see people like themselves and be assured that the *Green Book* was intended for their use. They would also see a book that philosophically supported the traditional push for self-help by the black middle class. The travel guide demonstrates the importance of economic independence to the myriad black business owners in the book and their fitness for the rights of full citizenship. A white corporate executive from Standard Oil looking at this conventional couple would see two people engaging in familiar activities and wearing familiar clothes. The Negro Motorist’s *Green Book* offered readers a mild-mannered black publication in which mainstream corporations could invest without fear of losing white customers.

---

33 Since the 18th century middle class African Americans tried to demonstrate their worthiness to be considered full citizens.
Figure 6:4 The 1948 cover of the *Negro Motorist Green Book* depicts a handsome middle class couple in a tidy suburban neighborhood. With matching suitcases in hand the couple heads for their car presumably ready for a vacation or perhaps a business trip. The idealized couple represents the aspirations of the black middle class. They own a house and a car and most certainly they have successful careers. Green also used the couple as the logo for the stationary for Victor Green, Inc. Courtesy, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
Figure 6:5 Several Green Book covers from the 1950s and 1960s emphasize the modernity of African Americans. Some show airplanes or automobiles like this cover from 1953. Others include images of men and women swinging golf clubs or getting into boats on the beach. Collection of the author
Despite the bland tone of the *Negro Motorist Green Book*, the language in its listings and advertisements revealed a racial consciousness and pride. The names of guest accommodations throughout the country indicate the solidarity that Green’s advertisers felt with one another as African Americans. The names of establishments listed in the *Green Book* indicate some knowledge of black history and the esteem in which those in the black travel business held black literary and historical figures and intellectuals. While most hotel accommodations were named for their owners—Mrs. E. Whittle Tourist Home, for example—many other business owners chose to recognize poets like Phillis Wheatley or Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Haitian freedom fighter Toussaint L’Overture, or Boston Massacre victim, Crispus Attucks. Dozens of hotels and motels around the country were named for Booker T. Washington and Harriet Tubman. Place names among the travel establishments display an interest both in African American history and in the culture of the African continent. The interest in Africa is somewhat general, but the listings of accommodations reveal dozens of establishments named for African places. For example, the Nile-Congo Inn welcomed travelers in Raleigh, North Carolina and in Baltimore the Sphinx Restaurant served hungry tourists. St. Louis businesses communicated an interest in exoticism with taverns named Casbah, Zanzibar, and Casablanca and a hotel named Poro. Poro, a Mende word for a devotional society in West African society, was also a popular name for restaurants, inns, and an African American hair straightening process.34

Harlem was place of national interest. The neighborhood gained a reputation as the largest and most vibrant African American community in the nation—the country’s “black capital.” It was home to African American authors and poets, politicians, musicians, and intellectuals and a source of great pride to black Americans. Black nightclubs and hotels across the country associated themselves with Harlem. With names like the Harlem, Little Harlem, Cotton Club, Savoy, and Alhambra, perhaps the pretenders hoped to recreate the atmosphere, or at least the popularity, of the originals.

Victor Green himself had a personal interest in African art objects. His nephew remembers his office being full of carvings of elephants and other objects all imported from Africa. Green used his *Green Book* to advertise the decorative objects that he sold as a part of another business called, Africa Mart. The mail order catalog business, operated from Green’s offices in Leonia, New Jersey, sold plaques carved in bas-relief, carved ebony African animals—monkeys, lions, elephants, crocodiles, and rabbits—and other ornaments for the home like hassocks from North Africa, and hand-carved letter openers, and shoehorns. Nigerian Ebony objects imported “from the Benin Forest,” were Victor Green’s particular favorites. His research indicated that these carvings reflected a quality of craftsmanship unparalleled elsewhere. He advertised them as “real African art which no craftsman in the world can reproduce.”

---

Figure 6:6 Victor Green was an entrepreneur who operated several businesses, including a mail-order business in African art objects. The craftsmanship of the African carvers inspired Green to share the objects with his readers. The carving reflected Green’s personal interest in Africa and his race pride. Collection of the author
While Green assumed the rhetoric necessary to make the *Green Book* attractive to white supporters and at the same time to black middle class readers, he also used it to promote his interest in African cultural objects, an interest that reveals his desire to connect African American culture to African culture. The black middle class shared this interest. In ever increasing numbers they took African vacations and followed the continent’s significant political events. Nigerian independence from Great Britain in 1960, for example, led to a special Nigerian Independence Tour planned in 1962 by the Henderson Travel Agency, one of the largest black agencies in the country for elite black patrons. The desire to reclaim black history and culture also led many members of the black middle class to decorate their homes with African objects.\(^{36}\)

The middle class language of Victor Green’s travel guide book implied middle class standards of behavior. Both language and behavior were measured, moderate, and polite. *The Green Book* openly helped readers’ avoid embarrassing or unpleasant social situations while traveling, rather than confronting them, yet the book encouraged blacks to travel—to leave the comfort of their neighborhoods and go out into segregated America where unknown dangers lurked. While detesting segregation the black middle class...

---

\(^{36}\) Articles in black magazines and newspapers in the 1950s and 1960s in increasing numbers discuss African history and culture and encouraged travel to the African continent. For example, Marguerite Cartwright described her several trips to different countries in Africa in a series of articles in Negro History Bulletin: “Trip to Africa,” *Negro History Bulletin*, December 9, 1958, 57-59; an article appearing in the *Pittsburgh Courier* cited the Henderson Travel Service as being the first to organize group tours to Africa. The article lists specific individuals and groups as past clients of these tours and offered similar services to others. Gerri Major and Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Jeffries of Johnson Publishing Company and Dr. and Mrs. Warmoth T. Gibbs former President of A&T College were among those on the company’s “Nigerian Independence Tour” in 1962. “Henderson Travel Service Caters ‘Prestige Clients’” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 27, 1962: 10.
class needed to use segregated facilities to survive. Black travelers who read the *Green Book* would have patronized the hotels, motels, and restaurants that were listed in the Guide. They would have contributed to the prosperity of these black businesses at the same time that the NAACP and other black middle class organizations agitated for admission to mainstream white hotels like the Hilton and the Sheridan. The *Green Book*, the travelers who used the *Green Book*, and segregation itself fostered schizophrenia. Blacks who succeeded economically traveled for business and for pleasure and in traveling made visible the injustice of segregation and the hypocrisy of white Americans touting equality and freedom. Yet, in response to the needs of black Americans traveling in a segregated society, black entrepreneurs catering to the special needs of black travelers supported the system of segregation.
“Where Will You Stay Tonight?”

“We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.”

Martin Luther King, I Have a Dream Speech, August 28, 1963

“A shack,” that’s what Hazel Sinclair called the small house that her husband Clayton convinced her to buy in Kittery Point, Maine. It was dilapidated and completely unimproved. There was no electricity in the house or even a bathroom, but it was all they could afford. Hazel refused to live in the house until Clayton spent many months fixing it up. The house was not right on the coast, but located in a pretty wooded area a few miles from the beach. Hazel had started coming to the region as a maid traveling with a white family from Manhattan. The family had brought her on vacation with them, and she had met people in the black community in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Hazel loved the area. Clayton similarly learned about the Maine coast when he drove his employer up for the summer. He loved to drive and never minded the long trip from New York. The couple met at the African American church in Portsmouth, and together they explored the Maine coastline. In 1939 Clayton and Hazel were employed by a local resident, Mrs. Eleanor Tucker, but by the time they opened “Rock Rest,” as they called their guesthouse, Clayton was working at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard just across the bridge from Kittery.¹

Clayton imagined what the small house could be. A shrewd businessman, he bought quite a bit of land with the property. The house had a porch for rocking and keeping cool on warm summer nights, a living room with a working fireplace, a large dining room, and a kitchen for Hazel to cook her scrumptious meals. Later the Sinclairs added an extra room and bathroom downstairs. In the afternoons Hazel could rest in the rocking chair in this sitting room off the kitchen before cooking dinner. The Sinclairs started their business by renting their own bedroom and later added five guest rooms and two bathrooms to the garage for additional guests. The house could hold about sixteen people with all of the rooms occupied. The guesthouse was primarily Hazel’s business. She kept the books and did all of the cooking. Clayton managed the vegetable gardens, took care of the grounds, and served dinner to the guests in his formal white jacket. Hazel hired local girls to help her set the tables, change the beds, and clean up after meals.\footnote{Ibid.}

Families returned to Rock Rest year after year to enjoy the hospitality and the comfortable accommodations. Many had stories to tell about their experiences with Jim Crow while traveling. Most of the guests were middle class vacationers who stayed in Kittery for one or two weeks, but some were just passing through and needed a place for a night or two that was hospitable to African Americans. Although the Sinclairs owned a Negro Motorists’ Green Book they did not place advertisements in it. Guests discovered the little guesthouse, tucked away in Kittery’s woods, by word of mouth, sometimes through circuitous routes. One person recommended the site to a friend who suggested it to another friend. “Your place has been highly recommended by Mrs. Gladys (I think the
last name is Shirley) to a friend of mine, Mrs. Adelaide Bill Smith, who has left for California,” wrote a potential lodger pleading for a room in 1952. The letter writer, Louise Gardner, assured Hazel that she would know the original recommender if only Louise could check the name with her friend in California. “I understand that she stops at your place taking and getting her children from school,” she wrote. Summer guests became more like friends than lodgers.³

![Figure 7:1 Hazel and Clayton's “Rock Rest” prior to its renovation. Hazel called it a "shack" and refused to move in until Clayton made substantial repairs. Courtesy University of Rhode Island, Rock Rest Collection](image)

Each year the Sinclairs made more improvements to the building. They converted the first floor of the garage to an activity center and game room for inclement weather with board games, books, and chairs for sitting and talking. They improved the guest rooms and added gardens. The automobile was essential to the success of Rock Rest

because the guesthouse was off the beaten path and away from the beach. Visitors drove up from New York City to Rock Rest and then in the evening they drove into York, Maine for dancing or listening to the jukebox.⁴

![Figure 7:2 The Sinclairs named their cottage on Maine's rocky shore “Rock Rest.” The original sign made by Clayton Sinclair remains today. Photograph by Gretchen Sorin, 2007](image)

Hazel documented Rock Rest’s summer guests carefully, recording who visited and when they stayed. Rooms rented for $40 dollars per week, per person in 1957 and increased gradually to $95 per week by 1974.⁵ Her account book also recorded how much she spent on meat and groceries, vegetables and fruit, lobsters for her famous

---


⁵ “Summer Guest Sinclair’s, Kittery Point Maine,” 1957-1976, Rock Rest Collection,
Sunday dinners, milk, bread, ice cream, eggs, laundry, and electricity. She also recorded occasional expenditures for dishes, glasses, and linens and carefully calculated her profit for the season.

Figure 7:3 Rock Rest, the African American tourist cottage in Kittery, Maine as it appears today. Although the owners, Hazel and Clayton Sinclair, did not advertise in the *Negro Motorist's Green Book*, they owned a copy of the guide and used it for their own travels at the end of the summer tourist season. Photograph by Gretchen Sorin, 2007.

Rock Rest’s account book indicates an African American business that flourished during the 1950s and early 1960s when black vacationers relegated to segregated tourist accommodations needed the services most. Rock Rest served between thirty-three and forty-two guests each summer from 1957, when the account book begins, to 1964 when the number of guests started to decline. Most guests stayed for one week. During these
years the profit for the June through August season was strongest, between $611 and $843. After 1964 the number of guests declined while the Sinclair’s per guest charges increased. Fewer African American vacationers depended on black tourist homes, hotels, and motels as more and more accommodations opened to them. During some seasons the profit margin for the guesthouse was extremely small—$286 for 22 guests in 1965. In other years the number of summer visitors was particularly low—only 13 in 1969.

Figure 7:4 Today, Hazel's kitchen at Rock Rest looks as if the Sinclairs just stepped out. The building is in the process of being acquired by the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail. Photograph by Gretchen Sorin, 2007.

By 1976 there were no entries in the account book. Hazel wrote simply, “Due to the high cost of everything know [sic] guest.”
Rock Rest Accounts  
1957-1976

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of summer guests</th>
<th>Cost of lodging per week</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Misc. Expense</th>
<th>Season’s Profit June-August</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>$1,940</td>
<td>$1,061.83</td>
<td>$54.79 linen</td>
<td>$863.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1,810</td>
<td>1,020.30</td>
<td></td>
<td>789.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1,775</td>
<td>1,068.40</td>
<td>28.69 table linen</td>
<td>677.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1,895</td>
<td>1,156.67</td>
<td></td>
<td>743.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1,787</td>
<td>1,175.70</td>
<td></td>
<td>611.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,825</td>
<td>1,165.67</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>643.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,950</td>
<td>1,191.41</td>
<td></td>
<td>758.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,032</td>
<td>772.54</td>
<td></td>
<td>259.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>863.19</td>
<td></td>
<td>286.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>831.17</td>
<td>92.12 advertising</td>
<td>414.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1,620</td>
<td>1,027.34</td>
<td></td>
<td>592.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td>982.76</td>
<td></td>
<td>652.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>450.09</td>
<td></td>
<td>377.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>775.57</td>
<td></td>
<td>624.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>946.90</td>
<td></td>
<td>803.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>756.13</td>
<td></td>
<td>843.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1,126</td>
<td>560.46</td>
<td></td>
<td>565.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>424.64</td>
<td></td>
<td>385.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>305.22</td>
<td></td>
<td>234.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7:1 This table, constructed from data in Hazel Sinclair's household business accounts, illustrates the success of her business during the 1950s and early 1960s when African American vacationers depended on segregated accommodations for lodging. As African Americans were accepted at an increasing number of establishments the Sinclairs’ guests diminished. Of course, the account book does not explain all of the factors that might have contributed to the ups and downs of the Sinclairs’ business from bad weather to a downturn in the economy or a generational shift in the types of vacations that African Americans sought. But, the dwindling number of guests and Hazel’s comment on the last page suggests a business that was struggling for some time.6

6Summer Guest Sinclair’s, Kittery Point Maine,”1957-1976, Rock Rest Collection. Following Hazel’s death in 1995 the house became the property of the Sinclairs’ son. All of the furniture, household objects, personal and business papers remained in the house making it an important African American social history document. The Portsmouth Historical Society and the  

248
By the 1960s African American guest houses like Rock Rest were a feature of a passing era. Black middle class community groups used their increasing financial clout to boycott chain hotels that discriminated. These groups deprived all hotels within a franchise of bookings for black national church or club conventions if any of their franchise owners kept black customers out. With the support of business and vacation travelers, fraternities and sororities, and religious groups, the NAACP put increasing pressure on two corporations with a record of discrimination—Hilton Hotels and Howard Johnson’s. Other civil rights organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) also targeted segregation in public accommodations. The gradual decline in the Sinclairs’ business corresponded with these actions and with passage of major civil rights legislation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 signed by President Lyndon Johnson ended legal segregation in schools, housing, and public accommodations. The large chain hotels and other overnight lodgings opened to black travelers.

James Avery, a black corporate executive for Esso, described the experience of being on the front lines of the black middle class fighting a new, more subtle and sophisticated kind of bigotry. Black executives did not have to face guns, “like those [black students] trying to go to school in Alabama,” Avery remembered, but they faced constant indignities, verbal assaults, and rebuffs at hotels where their white colleagues

---

Portsmouth black -----have been working together to preserve the manuscript materials and to maintain the house for some yet to be determined not-for-profit purpose.

stayed. “What’s it like being the head nigger in charge up there at Esso,” a colleague asked Avery during a trip to Chicago. Even in response to such open and infuriating bigotry Avery, like many other members of the black middle class, kept his cool. A calm and measured demeanor was intended to demonstrate his class status. “You couldn’t get mad. You always had to remain calm no matter what, because they wanted you to get mad. And you had to succeed no matter what.”

“Gone are the nightmares of yesterday’s travel for Negroes,” read an article in the New York Amsterdam News in 1966. “[The] civil rights act with its emphasis on public accommodations has caused facilities across the country to mend their ways. . .” In the same article the paper reported that Ebony Magazine admonished its readers not to forget about black businesses that for years provided black travelers with the only places they were welcome in segregated America. “Competition” was the new “watchword” and Ebony confidently informed readers that black resorts would be competitive and keep their clientele. But black travelers flocked to the national hotel and restaurant chains that the NAACP and other civil rights organizations had pushed so hard to open. In addition to offering broad coverage across the country, chain hotels offered convenient locations and consistent accommodations, the same characteristics that attracted white travelers. Black corporate executives could now stay at the same hotels as their white counterparts.

---

The Negro Motorist’s Green Book and other black travel guides ceased publication in the 1960s. As Victor Green predicted, the travel guides would have succeeded when they helped to put themselves out of business. “There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published,” he wrote. “That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment.”

His vision of full equality was overstated, but mainstream travel guides, including the Mobil Travel Guide, began to appeal to African American readers.

While some African Americans used their automobiles to avoid encounters with whites many found that simply driving across a segregated country placed them in confrontations that ranged from hurtful and awkward to dangerous. But, these confrontations also challenged Jim Crow. From the 1940s to the 1960s the black middle class waged their war on segregation on two fronts. The activists waged a visible war in the form of protests, demonstrations, boycotts, and court challenges that resulted in the legislation that brought the legal end to segregation. Less obvious and more passive efforts also contributed. Victor Green and his contemporaries created travel guides specifically for the black middle class to enable them to defeat prejudice through travel. Many middle class blacks used their consumer buying power to actively participate in America’s consumer culture. They sought to convince whites that they were a market to be reckoned with, and that consumer power could be used to pressure the marketplace to

end discrimination. Middle class African Americans believed that the automobile was one of the tools that could help to broaden acceptance of African Americans and contribute to the end of segregation.
Appendix A

The following charts provide detailed data drawn from the 1950 Federal Census of Population on median income by race. Also included are bar graphs comparing the income of African Americans and white Americans and a pie chart listing the number of unemployed in each group. These data supplement the information in the chart on page 52. Although African Americans had a lower median income they tended to purchase larger automobiles. The data listed are for Baltimore, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C.
Table 87.—INCOME IN 1949 OF PERSONS, BY RACE AND SEX, FOR THE STATE, FARM AND NONFARM, AND FOR STANDARD METROPOLITAN AREAS AND CITIES OF 100,000 OR MORE: 1950

(Based on 20-percent sample; available complete-count data in table 28, 29, and 30. Median not shown where base is less than 500)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income in Dollars</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Negro</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Baltimore Adult Population, 1950</th>
<th>Distribution of White and Negro Income - Baltimore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1,000- $1,499</td>
<td>$1,500- $1,999</td>
<td>$2,000- $2,499</td>
<td>$2,500- $2,999</td>
<td>$3,000- $3,499</td>
<td>$3,500- $3,999</td>
<td>$4,000- $4,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$898</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$900</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$902</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$904</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$906</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Baltimore Adult Population, 1950

- White: 77%
- Negro: 22%
- Other: 1%

Percent Unemployed - Baltimore

- White: 20%
- Negro: 25%
- Other: 30%

Distribution of White and Negro Income - Baltimore

- White: $1,499 - $1,999
- Negro: $1,499 - $1,999

Income in Dollars

- White: $1,500 - $1,999
- Negro: $1,500 - $1,999

*Numbers may not total 100 due to rounding.
### CHICAGO

**Table 87.—INCOME IN 1949 OF PERSONS, BY RACE AND SEX, FOR THE STATE, FARM AND NONFARM, AND FOR STANDARD METROPOLITAN AREAS AND CITIES OF 100,000 OR MORE: 1939—Con.**

| Race          | Total 14 years without | $1 to $500 | $1,000 | $1,500 | $2,000 | $2,500 | $3,000 | $3,500 | $4,000 | $4,500 | $5,000 | $5,500 | $6,000 | $6,500 | $7,000 | $7,500 | $8,000 | $8,500 | $9,000 | $9,500 | $10,000 | Income |
|---------------|------------------------|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
|               | Total or less          |            |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |         |
|               | Old and other          |            |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |         |
| White         | 1,972,205              | 1,843,355  | 145,820| 117,335| 97,620 | 72,800 | 53,920 | 40,660 | 33,350| 27,500 | 23,850| 19,850 | 16,650 | 13,950 | 11,450 | 9,450  | 7,450  | 6,050  | 5,350  | 4,950  | 4,350  | 3,950  |
| Black         | 781,305                | 518,155    | 93,510 | 56,800 | 35,600 | 25,400 | 18,400 | 13,400 | 10,700| 8,650  | 7,150 | 5,500  | 4,000  | 3,000  | 2,500  | 2,000  | 1,600  | 1,200  | 800    | 600    | 400    | 300    |

*Numbers may not total 100 due to rounding.*
Table 87.—INCOME IN 1949 OF PERSONS, BY RACE AND SEX, FOR THE STATE, FARM AND NONFARM, AND FOR STANDARD METROPOLITAN AREAS AND CITIES OF 100,000 OR MORE: 1950—Con.

[Based on 20-percent sample; available complete-count data in tables 22, 36, and 38. Median not shown where base is less than 500]

| Income in Dollars | $1 to $499 | $500 to $999 | $1,000 to $1,499 | $1,500 to $2,000 | $2,000 to $2,999 | $3,000 to $4,999 | $5,000 to $6,999 | $7,000 to $9,999 | $10,000 or over
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons total</td>
<td>Old and younger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New York Adult Population, 1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Unemployed</th>
<th>New York</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Negro &amp; Other</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of White and Negro Income - New York

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Negro</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>$1 to $499</td>
<td>$500 to $999</td>
<td>$1,000 to $1,499</td>
<td>$1,500 to $1,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cumulative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Negro</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers may not total 100 due to rounding.
# Table 87 — Income in 1949 of Persons, by Race and Sex, for the State, Farm and Nonfarm, and for Standard Metropolitan Areas and Cities of 100,000 or More: 1950—Con.

[Based on 20-per cent sample; available complete-count data in tables 23, 25, and 38. Median not shown where base is less than 500]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total 14 years old and older</th>
<th>Persons without Income</th>
<th>$1 to $500</th>
<th>$1,000 to $1,500</th>
<th>$2,000 to $3,000</th>
<th>$3,500 to $4,500</th>
<th>$5,000 to $6,000</th>
<th>$6,500 to $7,000</th>
<th>$7,500 to $10,000</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>1,623,945</td>
<td>$932,945</td>
<td>$94,790</td>
<td>$115,143</td>
<td>$118,161</td>
<td>$111,065</td>
<td>$115,920</td>
<td>$88,770</td>
<td>$45,860</td>
<td>38,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1,341,245</td>
<td>624,273</td>
<td>94,950</td>
<td>97,990</td>
<td>105,181</td>
<td>111,656</td>
<td>105,358</td>
<td>45,860</td>
<td>38,965</td>
<td>10,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,330</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### Philadelphia Adult Population, 1950

- White: 375.6%
- Negro: 36.6%
- Other: 17.8%

### Distribution of White and Negro Income - Philadelphia

- **White**
  - $1-$499: 3.7%
  - $500-$999: 3.5%
  - $1,000-$1,499: 1.9%
  - $1,500-$2,000: 2.2%
  - $2,000-$2,499: 1.9%
  - $2,500-$4,499: 3.2%
  - $4,500-$5,999: 4.1%
  - $6,000-$7,499: 5.6%
  - $7,500-$9,999: 7.3%
  - $10,000+: 9.9%

- **Negro**
  - $1-$499: 8.7%
  - $500-$999: 8.5%
  - $1,000-$1,499: 8.7%
  - $1,500-$2,000: 9.6%
  - $2,000-$2,499: 10.4%
  - $2,500-$4,499: 12.0%
  - $4,500-$5,999: 13.8%
  - $6,000-$7,499: 16.0%
  - $7,500-$9,999: 18.7%
  - $10,000+: 22.0%

---

*Numbers may not total 100 due to rounding.*
## PITTSBURGH

### Table 87.—INCOME IN 1949 OF PERSONS, BY RACE AND SEX, FOR THE STATE, FARM AND NONFARM, AND FOR STANDARD METROPOLITAN AREAS AND CITIES OF 100,000 OR MORE: 1950—Con.

[Based on 20-percent sample; available complete-count data in tables 26, 30, and 36. Medians not shown where base is less than 5000.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total 16 years</th>
<th>Persons without</th>
<th>$1 to $499</th>
<th>$500 to $999</th>
<th>$1,000 to $1,499</th>
<th>$1,500 to $1,999</th>
<th>$2,000 to $2,499</th>
<th>$2,500 to $2,999</th>
<th>$3,000 to $3,499</th>
<th>$3,500 to $3,999</th>
<th>$4,000 to $4,499</th>
<th>$4,500 to $4,999</th>
<th>$5,000 to $5,999</th>
<th>$6,000 to $6,999</th>
<th>$7,000 to $7,999</th>
<th>$10,000 and over</th>
<th>Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>or less</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$1,000 to $1,999</td>
<td>$2,000 to $2,999</td>
<td>$3,000 to $3,999</td>
<td>$4,000 to $4,999</td>
<td>$5,000 to $5,999</td>
<td>$6,000 to $6,999</td>
<td>$7,000 to $7,999</td>
<td>$10,000 and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>529,200</td>
<td>191,865</td>
<td>213,685</td>
<td>39,210</td>
<td>31,920</td>
<td>24,597</td>
<td>34,097</td>
<td>24,150</td>
<td>19,425</td>
<td>12,725</td>
<td>7,205</td>
<td>9,390</td>
<td>4,145</td>
<td>2,490</td>
<td>5,215</td>
<td>32,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>456,186</td>
<td>180,820</td>
<td>277,380</td>
<td>33,615</td>
<td>29,185</td>
<td>25,735</td>
<td>37,300</td>
<td>20,195</td>
<td>21,780</td>
<td>13,061</td>
<td>12,326</td>
<td>7,040</td>
<td>9,255</td>
<td>4,080</td>
<td>4,220</td>
<td>5,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>73,014</td>
<td>111,045</td>
<td>36,305</td>
<td>5,555</td>
<td>5,115</td>
<td>4,495</td>
<td>8,900</td>
<td>5,825</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>2,010</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4,055</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,050</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Pittsburgh Adult Population, 1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percent Unemployed by Pittsburgh</th>
<th>Percentage of Wage Earners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>$1 to $499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>$500 to $999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>$1,000 to $1,499</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Distribution of White and Negro Income - Pittsburgh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income in Dollars</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Negro</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1-$499</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500-$999</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000-$1,499</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,500-$1,999</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,000-$2,499</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,500-$2,999</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3,000-$3,499</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3,500-$3,999</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$4,000-$4,499</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$4,500-$4,999</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,000-$5,999</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$6,000-$6,999</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$7,000-$7,999</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000+</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers may not total 100 due to rounding.*
## WASHINGTON, D. C.

### Table 87.—INCOME IN 1949 OF PERSONS, BY RACE AND SEX, FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AND FOR THE WASHINGTON, D. C., STANDARD METROPOLITAN AREA: 1970

(Based on 20-percent sample; available complete-count data in tables 25, 35, and 36. Median not shown where base is less than 50)

| Persons without income | Total 14 years and older | $1 to $999 | $1,000 | $1,500 | $1,000 | $2,000 | $2,500 | $3,000 | $3,500 | $4,000 | $4,500 | $5,000 | $5,500 | $6,000 | $6,500 | $7,000 | $7,500 | $8,000 | $8,500 | $9,000 | $9,500 | $10,000 | Income
|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------|         |
| Total 14 years and older | 645,852                  | 158,440   | 434,045 | 40,709 | 40,280 | 43,660 | 42,260 | 57,320 | 56,245 | 40,910 | 29,860 | 17,800 | 11,670 | 18,130 | 8,020 | 11,425 | 10,125 | 57,670 |
| White                  | 435,150                  | 100,595   | 292,330 | 29,920 | 22,310 | 22,600 | 21,875 | 29,450 | 29,400 | 23,020 | 18,195 | 10,815 | 15,355 | 8,095  | 11,120 | 9,845  | 36,225 |
| Negro                  | 210,702                  | 57,845    | 141,710 | 14,615 | 17,750 | 20,685 | 20,215 | 27,780 | 21,060 | 15,010 | 11,240 | 10,160 | 6,550  | 7,005  | 3,940  | 4,010  | 21,365 |
| Other                  | 2,794                    | 735       | 1,725   | 165    | 230    | 159    | 205    | 146    | 165    | 175    | 75     | 15     | 25     | 20     | 45     | 10     | 20     |

### Distribution of White and Negro Income - Washington, D.C.

- **District of Columbia Adult Population, 1970**
  - Percent Unemployed: 67%
  - Percent Unemployed: 33%

### Percent Unemployed - Washington, D.C.

- White: 25.2%
- Negro: 20.4%
- Other: 29.0%

### Percentage of Wage Earners

| Race     | 1$-$499 | $500-$999 | $1,000 | $1,500 | $2,000 | $2,500 | $3,000 | $3,500 | $4,000 | $4,500 | $5,000 | $5,500 | $6,000 | $6,500 | $7,000 | $7,500 | $8,000 | $8,500 | $9,000 | $9,500 | $10,000 |
|----------|---------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| White    |         |           |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| Negro    |         |           |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| Other    |         |           |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |

### Income Distribution

- **Numbers may not total 100 due to rounding**

- **Cumulative**
  - White: 8.8
  - Negro: 10.5

- **Cumulative**
  - White: 18.4
  - Negro: 23.9

- **Cumulative**
  - White: 31.8
  - Negro: 36.1

- **Cumulative**
  - White: 41.8
  - Negro: 52.7

- **Cumulative**
  - White: 54.3
  - Negro: 72.7

- **Cumulative**
  - White: 67.7
  - Negro: 86.3

- **Cumulative**
  - White: 81.2
  - Negro: 98.9

- **Cumulative**
  - White: 90.1
  - Negro: 99.0

- **Cumulative**
  - White: 99.2
  - Negro: 99.9
Appendix B

The following list includes the number of establishments listed in the 1949 Negro Motorist Green Book by state for each town or city. These data were used to create the Map.
# The Green Book 1949

## Alabama
- Anniston 1
- Birmingham 4
- Mobile 3
- Montgomery 3
- Sheffield 1
- Tuscaloosa 2

## Arkansas
- Arkadelphia 7
- Brinkley 1
- El Dorado 6
- Fayetteville 3
- Fort Smith 2
- Hope 8
- Hot Springs 12
- Little Rock 56
- North Little Rock 7
- Camden 9
- South Camden 1
- Pine Bluff 12
- Fordyce 1
- Helena 1
- Russellville 1
- Texarkana 5

## Arizona
- Douglas 2
- Nogales 1
- Phoenix 17
- Tucson 1
- Yuma 1

## California
- Berkeley 3
- El Centro 3
- Fresno 16
- Los Angeles 100
- Elsinore 1
- Hollywood 1
- Oakland 11
- Perris 1
- Pasadena 3
- Sacramento 1

## California cont.
- San Diego 11
- San Francisco 10
- Santa Monica 1
- Tulare 2
- Vallejo 1
- Victorville 1

## Colorado
- Colorado Springs 2
- Denver 39
- Greeley 1
- La Junta 3
- La Mar 2
- Montrose 7
- Pueblo 3
- Trinidad 1

## Connecticut
- Bridgeport 4
- Hartford 6
- New Haven 13
- New London 2
- Stamford 3
- Waterbury 2
- West Haven 2

## Delaware
- Dover 3
- Laurel 3
- Townsend 2
- Wilmington 10

## Florida
- Daytona Beach 4
- Delray Beach 1
- Fort Lauderdale 3
- Jacksonville 10
- Lake City 6
- Lakeland 2
- Miami 15

## Florida cont.
- Orlando 1
- Pensacola 2
- Sebring 1
- South Jacksonville 1
- St. Augustine 2
- Tampa 5
- West Palm Beach 1

## Georgia
- Adrian 1
- Albany 3
- Atlanta 22
- Augusta 4
- Brunswick 13
- Columbus 7
- Douglas 9
- Dublin 3
- Eastman 1
- Macon 15
- Savannah 7
- Way Cross 7

## Idaho
- Boise 4
- Pocatello 2

## Illinois
- Chicago 48
- Centralia 4
- Danville 1
- Peoria 4
- Springfield 6
- Ottawa 1
- Rockford 5
- Waukegan 1

## Indiana
- Anderson 1
- Elkhart 1
- Evansville 4
- Fort Wayne 6
- Gary 1
- French Lick 1

## Washington D.C.
- 64
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indiana cont.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffersonville</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokomo</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan City</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muncie</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Bend</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terre Haute</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Baden Springs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evansville</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iowa</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Rapids</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des Moines</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubuque</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottumwa</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sioux City</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterloo</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kansas</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atchison</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffeyville</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emporia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwardsville</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Scott</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiawatha</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hutchinson</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junction City</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larned</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavenworth</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsons</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topeka</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wichita</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kentucky</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling Green</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabethtown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kentucky cont.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazard</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopkinsville</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexington</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln Ridge</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisville</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paducah</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Louisiana</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogalusa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Charles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansfield</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan City</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Iberia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opelusas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotlandville</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shreveport</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maine</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardiner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maryland</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annapolis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buena Vista</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colton</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hagerstown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havre de Grace</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princess Anne</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salisbury</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparrows Point</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turners Station</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Marlboro</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Massachusetts</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attleboro</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Massachusetts cont.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Barrington</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyannis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Adams</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needham</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randolph</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxbury</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Hanson</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockbridge</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swampscott</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woburn</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Michigan</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Arbor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle Creek</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benton Harbor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitely</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flint</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Junction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idlewild</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscoda</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saginaw</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Haven</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Rivers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minnesota</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duluth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motley</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cloud</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Paul</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mississippi</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biloxi</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Mississippi cont.
- Canton 3
- Cleveland 1
- Columbus 6
- Greenville 2
- Grenada 3
- Hattiesburg 3
- Jackson 16
- Laurel 5
- Macomb 2
- Mendenhall 1
- Meridian 4
- Mound Bayou 4
- New Albany 4
- Yazoo City 2

### Missouri
- Cape Girardeau 3
- Carthage 1
- Columbia 2
- Charleston 1
- Excelsior Springs 2
- Hannibal 1
- Jefferson City 16
- Joplin 4
- Kansas City 60
- Lebanon 3
- Moberly 3
- Popular Bluff 1
- Sedalia 3
- Springfield 1
- St. Joseph 1
- St. Louis 102
- East St. Louis 12

### New Jersey
- Asbury Park 25
- Atlantic City 60
- Bayonne 3
- Bell Meade 1
- Berlin 1
- Bridgeton 1
- Camden 4
- Cape May 4
- East Orange 5
- Eatontown 1
- Egg Harbor 2
- Elizabeth 5
- Englewood 3
- Hackensack 6
- Haskell 1
- Hightstown 2
- Jersey City 4
- Kingston 1
- Keyport 2
- Kennelworth 1
- Lakewood 1
- Lawnside 10
- Linden 2
- Long Branch 3
- Madison 2
- Magnolia 1
- Mahwah 1
- Monmouth Junction 1
- Montclair 28
- Morristown 1
- Neptune 3
- Newark 56
- Ocean City 2
- Orange 12
- Paulsboro 1
- Paterson 5
- Perth Amboy 2
- Point Pleasant 1
- Pine Brook 3
- Plainfield 1
- Pleasantville 2
- Rahway 1
- Red Bank 10
- Roselle 2
- Scotch Plains 3

### New Jersey cont.
- Salem 1
- Sea Bright 1
- Sewaren 1
- Shrewsbury 1
- Summit 1
- Toms River 1
- Trenton 10
- Vaux Hall 2
- Wildwood 9
- Woodbury 1
- West Pleasantville 1

### New York
- Albany 6
- Bath 1
- Buffalo 77
- Croton-on-the-Hudson 1
- Hastings-on-Hudson 1
- Ithaca 1
- Glens Falls 1
- Jamestown 2
- Lackawanna 6
- Mechanicville 1
- Niagara Falls 11
- Port Jervis 1
- Poughkeepsie 2
- Rochester 7
- Saratoga Springs 1
- Schenectady 3
- Syracuse 13
- Utica 3
- Watertown 10
- New York City
- Harlem 244
- Brooklyn 62
- Bronx 46
- Long Island
  - Amityville 4
  - Corona 4
  - Flushing 1
  - Hempstead 3
  - Jamaica 6
- Staten Island
  - West Brighton 7
  - Port Richmond 1

263
Westchester
   Elmsford 1
   Mt. Vernon 7
   New Rochelle 11
   Ossining 1
   N. Tarrytown 3
   Tuckahoe 4
   Yonkers 1

Nevada
   Reno 2
   Las Vegas 1

New Mexico
   Albuquerque 2
   Carlsbad 3
   Las Cruces 1
   Roswell 3
   Tucumcari 4

North Carolina
   Asheville 7
   Bladenboro 1
   Carthage 1
   Charlotte 7
   Durham 31
   Elizabeth City 1
   Elizabethtown 5
   Fayetteville 11
   Gastonia 1
   Greensboro 8
   Greenville 5
   Hillsboro 1
   Henderson 1
   High Point 1
   Littleton 1
   Mt. Olive 1
   New Bern 3
   Lexington 1
   Raleigh 9
   Pinehurst 2
   Sanford 3
   Salisbury 1
   Sumter 1
   Whiteville 1
   Wilson 3

Ohio
   Akron 15
   Alliance 1
   Canton 5
   Cincinnati 106
   Cleveland 35
   Columbus 18
   Dayton 2
   Lima 4
   Lorain 5
   Mansfield 1
   Marietta 2
   Middletown 3
   Oberlin 1
   Springfield 19
   Steubenville 2
   Toledo 11
   Youngstown 9
   Zanesville 5

Oklahoma
   Boley 1
   Chickasha 1
   Enid 4
   Guthrie 2
   Muskogee 17
   Oklahoma City 22
   Okmulgee 4
   Shawnee 3
   Tulsa 13

Oregon
   Portland 10

Pennsylvania
   Allentown 1
   Altoona 4
   Coatesville 1
   Bedford Springs 1
   Chester 8
   Darby 1

Rhode Island
   Newport 2
   Providence 7

South Carolina
   Anderson 1
   Aiken 2
   Atlantic Beach 1
   Beaufort 1
   Charleston 5
   Cola 1
   Columbia 35
   Cheraw 9
   Cross Hill 1
   Florence 3
   Georgetown 5
   Greenville 9
   Mullins 8
   Orangeburg 1
   Spartanburg 21
   Rock Hill 1
   Sumter 7

South Dakota
   Aberdeen 7
   Sioux Falls 2
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Bristol 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chattanooga 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarksville 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knoxville 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lexington 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memphis 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murfreesboro 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nashville 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Abilene 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amarillo 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atlanta 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Austin 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beaumont 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corpus Christie 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corsicana 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dallas 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>El Paso 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fort Worth 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Galveston 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Henderson 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hitchcock 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Houston 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marshall 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexia 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Midland 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paris 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Port Arthur 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>San Antonio 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tyler 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Texarkana 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waco 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waxahachie 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wichita Falls 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northfield 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rutland 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Alexandria 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bedford 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buckaroe Beach 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caret 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charlottesville 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christianburg 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Danville 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dunbarton 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmville 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fredericksburg 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hampton 7 HBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harrisonburg 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hewlett 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lexington 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Luray 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lynchburg 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natural Bridge 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newport News 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norfolk 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Petersburg 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phoebus 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richmond 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roanoke 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Hill 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staunton 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tappahannock 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warrenton 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winchester 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>Beckley 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bluefield 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charleston 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarksburg 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairmont 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grafton 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huntington 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Montgomery 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morgantown 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parkersburg 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newburgh 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Sulphur Springs 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Fond du Lac 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oshkosh 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>Casper 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cheyenne 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rawlings 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rock Springs 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

265
Bibliography

**A Note about African American Travel Guides and the *Negro Motorist Green Book***:

While black tourist guides could be used by bus or train travelers African American travel handbooks were generally directed at those with the means to purchase an automobile. The booklets were generally small, a handy size to fit in a glove compartment, but also into a vest pocket. A few included driving maps; most did not, focusing instead on listings of hotels, motels, and restaurants—the establishments most likely to discriminate against black travelers. The precise number of black tourist guides produced during the period of segregation is unknown, but the sheer number of them indicates the depth of the need for this product. Advertisements for many different titles appear in the pages of the black press and in the back of black magazines, but few original volumes are housed in library collections. Most were probably discarded. Certainly some still lie undiscovered, molding in attics or among the old papers belonging to African American families. Many guides had only one or two issues or we know of their existence only through advertisements. The majority of the black travel guides were unsuccessful because they did not have sufficient circulation or advertising revenue to maintain them. In 1937, Bert E. Grayson, a black Chicago publisher, offered *Grayson’s Travel and Business Guide’s* second edition. The Guide was a list of approved hotels, cafes, resorts, and places of accommodation. ¹ The only evidence of Grayson’s Guide is an advertisement that appeared in the *Atlanta Daily World* in 1959 noting that the soon to be issued book will tell you “where you can eat, sleep, play, relax, without discrimination.” All of these travel guides were ephemeral objects, printed on

cheap paper and replaced each year because they went rapidly out of date. The 1963 edition of *Travelguide* urged readers to stay up to date by purchasing a new book every year since there were 500-600 changes in listings, addresses, and telephone numbers.\(^2\) In the 1960s passage of Civil Rights legislation gradually made these books obsolete and black families and businessmen probably discarded them (perhaps quite happily) as relics of a reprehensible age that had ended and that they preferred to forget. Ramona Green remembered that her husband, whose uncle Victor Green launched the *Negro Motorist Green Book* in 1936, kept one copy of the book in his sock drawer as a keepsake for years, but she has no idea what happened to it. The family never thought it was important.\(^3\)

A relatively small number of Victor Green’s *The Negro Motorist’s Green Books* are extant. Since almost every year Green changed the name of the book, it is difficult to list as a single bibliographic entry. The first volume, published by Victor Green and George Smith in 1937 indicated that the publishers planned to produce additional volumes annually in May of each year. Throughout the history of the guide book the title changed because the guide had expanded in scope and was seeking a larger audience. For example, the 1949 edition was titled, *The Negro Motorist Green Book, An International Travel Guide, USA, Alaska, Bermuda, Mexico, Canada.* In the 1950s the title was changed from the *Negro Motorist Green Book* to the *Negro Travelers’ Green Book* to reflect the inclusion of air travel and steamship travel, worldwide. The 1951 title was *The Negro Motorist Green Book an International Travel Guide: Railroad Edition.*

---


\(^3\) Ramona Green, interview with Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, December 21, 2005.
in the 1960s the publication dropped the word “Negro,” and renamed the travel guide *The Green Book Guide for Travel and Vacations*. As more public accommodations opened to black travelers and the need for a guide specifically keyed to black vacationers diminished, the Green Book sought to expand its readership to include foreigners traveling to the United States from abroad. The last volume of the *Green Book* located for this research project was dated 1966. Victor Green was dead, the company had been sold, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had banned segregated accommodations, although the practice of segregation certainly continued illegally in some places.

The popular periodicals of the twentieth century offer a considerable amount of information on public interest in travel and vacations during the twentieth century. Black newspapers and magazines proved a particularly valuable source for tracing the debate about segregation in public accommodations and reporting on events and individuals that did not appear in the mainstream press. Black newspapers also provide columns by black travel writers and social commentators. African American newspapers like *Sepia, Ebony,* and *Our World* included articles about automobile travel, celebrity travel, traffic accidents, and the state of black hospitals and healthcare.

**Published Biographies, Memoirs, and Travel Narratives**

Travel narratives were a popular form of writing from the eighteenth century to the present. By the first half of the twentieth century the new adventurers—automobile travelers—joined those writing about train travel to offer a variety of perspectives on the experience of seeing America before and after the development of the national highway
In addition, a variety of published biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs by African Americans, most of whom are now deceased, preserved memories of travel by train and automobile. Searching through these volumes proved a valuable source of information on African American experiences during the Jim Crow era and supported information gathered from oral history interviews.


**Studies and Surveys of the Negro market**

To learn about the relationship between African Americans and their automobiles, the considerable number of studies and articles related to the growth and development of the black consumer market proved particularly useful. As the black middle class grew they sought to determine the purchasing clout that black customers might exert in the marketplace. The ability to convince white mainstream businesses of black purchasing power could do two things. First it could result in a larger number of retail outlets in black communities and better treatment of black customers in stores. Secondly, it could encourage white businesses to market their products to blacks and use black models in their advertising. The marketing studies were generally conducted by research firms or survey companies and included very detailed surveys in the cities with the largest black populations.


_______. “Racial Differences in Consumption and Automobile Ownership.” University of Minnesota, 1959.


**Archival Collections**

Adirondack Travel Brochures, the Adirondack Museum Library, Blue Mountain Lake, New York.

Curt Teich Postcard Archives. Libertyville, Illinois. Illinois

Library of Congress, American Memory online Collection. www.loc.gov


Published Primary Sources


“Hotel Hopes Rise.” Business Week, June 8, 1940.


“Motoring Rules and Regulations in the National Parks.” *Outing* 72, (1918).


“Noted Clubwoman Visits City on Travel Survey.” *Atlanta Daily World*, 1959, 3.


______. “Keeping the Negro in His Place.” The American Mercury 17, (1929): 469-476.


Sullivan, David J. “Don't Do This--if You Want to Sell Your Products to Negroes!” *Sales Management* 52, (1943): 48-50.


**Secondary Works**


Foster, Mark S. “In the Face of "Jim Crow": Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945.” *Journal of Negro History* 84 Number 2, (1999): 130-149.


Web Based Sources

The explosion of web based manuscript, and audio collections provided a wealth of materials including ephemera, such as road maps and oral histories in both audio and transcribed formats about the history of Jim Crow America. In addition, a variety of public access, cold war films are available online at Atomic Films and the Prelinger Archives. The United State Tourist Bureau, a program of the New Deal is no longer in existence. The agency produced a magazine to encourage travel and to help the national economy get moving again during the depression. The magazine is the only remaining product of the Tourist Bureau and is now housed at Case Western Reserve University.


Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection
“Interview with Georgia Gilmore, conducted by Blackside, Inc. February 17, 1986, for
Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965). National Public Radio
2008).

Oral History Interviews

Vernell Allen
Albany, New York

Dorothy James Aramburo (deceased)
Sugar Land, Texas

Patricia Barker
Scotia, New York

Lonnie Bunch
Washington, D.C.

Willie Cooper
Chesapeake, VA 23325

Dr. Spencer Crew
George Mason University

Kevan Cullins
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

Valerie Cunningham
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Mudcat Grant
Los Angeles, CA.

Ramona Green
NY. NY

Bill Gwaltney
Colorado

Sylvester Hollis
Birmingham, AL

Kenneth Jackson
New York, New York
Henry Johnson  
Los Angeles, CA

Morris and Doris Johnson  
Manchester, Vermont

Angela Stewart  
Piney Woods, Mississippi