

Traveling During Segregation: The Negro Motorist Green Book

*adapted from resources found via South Carolina Digital Academy

Recommended Grade Level: 6th-12th grades

Duration: 3 class periods

Historical Background

The Negro Motorist Green Book, known simply as the Green Book was a travel guide that listed lodgings, tailors, beauty parlors, restaurants, gas stations and other businesses that welcomed African American clients during the Jim Crow era. Author, Victor H. Green, was a New York postal worker and community leader. His book became so popular that Green created a publishing office in Harlem and hired a staff to keep up with demand. By the 1940's 15,000 copies were produced annually, which were sold to both the white marketplace and Black-owned businesses.

Green's publication served as a marketing tool for Black businesses nationwide and helped him become an entrepreneur. In his introduction, Green wrote: "There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal rights and privileges in the United States." After passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Green ceased publication.

Objectives

- Students in Missouri public schools will acquire the knowledge and skills to gather, analyze and apply information and ideas.
- Students will use tools of social science inquiry (such as surveys, statistics, maps, documents)
- Students will investigate traveling patterns of African Americans during the first half of the 20th Century
- Students will create a travel itinerary through the United States for an African American family using the Green Book as a guide.
- Students will explain the effects of racial discrimination on African Americans as they traveled throughout the United States.

Learning Standards

This lesson meets the criteria for over 20 Grade-and Course-Level Expectations for Social Studies education for grades 6-12.

Materials

- Facsimiles of *The Negro Traveler's Green Book* (1940 & 1947 editions)
 - 1940 edition: <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/dc858e50-83d3-0132-2266-58d385a7b928>
 - 1947 edition: <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/29219280-892b-0132-4271-58d385a7bbd0>
- Itinerary Worksheet (master copy included)
- Access to Google Maps OR hard copy atlases (NOT included)
- Map of the United States (master copy included)

Lesson Preparation

- Organize students into groups of 4 or 5. If possible, arrange one class period for students to work in the computer lab to utilize Google Maps.
- Make copies of the United States map, Itinerary, and Question Guide as needed.

Directions

Class Meeting 1

- Begin by distributing one *Green Book* to each group. (Remember, there are 2 different versions.)
- Ask students to explore the book on their own. As they search, they will need to jot down questions they have and note interesting information. Allot ten minutes. Questions to prompt thinking could be:
 - o Why do you think this image was created?
 - o When was it made?
 - o What questions can you develop to help you learn more about this book?
- Ask students: Why was it necessary to have a guide like this for Blacks traveling throughout the United States? Which states seemed to have more accommodating locations for African Americans? Why do you think this was the case?
- Discuss questions above and student-generated questions with class.

Class Meeting 2

- Next, explain to students that they will need to create an itinerary for a Black family traveling by car from Chicago, Illinois to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Students will need to use the *Green Book*, a blank map of the United States, the itinerary sheet and guidelines included in this lesson, and Google Maps or an atlas. (You can substitute your own destination or starting point.)
- Allow one full class period to plan the itinerary. Students will need to keep track of their notes and questions for discussion afterward.

Class Meeting 3

- Have students trade their itineraries with a different group. Each group will critique itineraries for practicality, ask questions and discuss the idea of traveling for African Americans during legal segregation
- Groups will collect their own itineraries and use them to draw one group route map (using the blank copy of the United States map) that outlines their travels.

Extension

Reconvene the class and discuss the creation of their itineraries

- What complications did they encounter while planning their trip?
- Was planning this trip similar to how they prepare for family trips today? Have them compare/contrast the processes.

Optional Modifications

Time modification (to accommodate one-class lesson restrictions)

Focus the lesson on analyzing the *Green Book* itself and omit the itinerary creation component. Have groups compare the Missouri listings in the two editions. Alternatively, ask students to choose a business and research it at home, come back and report on it in class.

Technology modification (to accommodate limited access to technology/computers)

Check out atlases from the school library, disperse one to each group and have them map their travels manually as opposed to digitally. You could also assign the itinerary creation as an individual homework assignment/project if each child has reliable access to a computer outside of school.

Assessment

- Students should be able to explain (either verbally or in a written reflection) why doing something simple like traveling to visit a family member during segregation may have been a complex process for most African Americans.