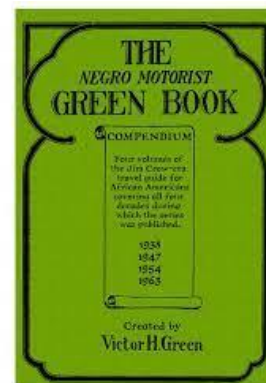


The Negro Motorist Green Book

Jim Crow laws legalized racial segregation, limiting opportunities available to Black people for about 100 years - from Reconstruction after the Civil War to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Our story starts with the advent of automobile ownership and development of highways, when independent travel became more prevalent. Despite limitations imposed by segregation, there was also an expanding African-American middle class that often included automobile ownership.

However, the freedom of travel enjoyed by the White middle class was not the same for Black travellers. White owned businesses may refuse to sell them fuel, or food, and whites-only hotels would not welcome them. Beyond the inconvenience and humiliation of being turned away, there was an ever-present threat of violence. "Sundown towns" put African-Americans in danger if they stayed beyond sunset. The risks were high.

Published annually, the green book provided a rundown of hotels, guest houses, service stations, drug stores, taverns, barber shops and restaurants that were known to be safe ports of call for African American travelers. (1)



The book originated in 1936, authored by an African-American mailman in New York City by the name of Victor Hugo Green. The difficulty, embarrassment, and fear that accompanied car travel for Black people became especially apparent to Green after he married a woman from Richmond, Virginia, to which the couple traveled from their home in Harlem. To compile the listing, Green, then age 44, drew on his own firsthand experience as well as recommendations from fellow postal workers. (Green lived in Harlem but delivered mail in New Jersey.) He found a model for his publication in the guides for Jewish travelers that appeared in Jewish newspapers. (2)

Its first edition, a 15 page guide, was focused on New York City, but over time expanded to cover most of the United States, parts of Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda. It eventually sold around 15,000 copies per year, distributed by mail order, by black-owned businesses and Esso service stations, some of which—unusual for the oil industry at the time—were franchised to African Americans. (3)

Green died in 1960, four years before the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act greatly reduced the need for the Green Book, which ceased publication in 1967.

Four issues (1940, 1947, 1954, and 1963) have been republished in facsimile (as of December 2017), and have sold well. Twenty-three additional issues have now been digitized by the New York Public Library Digital Collections. (3)

- (1) <https://www.history.com/news/the-green-book-the-black-travelers-guide-to-jim-crow-america>
- (2) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Green-Book-travel-guide>
- (3) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Negro_Motorist_Green_Book