

Overground Railroad Teaching Guide



ABRAMS PRESS READING GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

OVERGROUND RAILROAD

The *GREEN BOOK* and the Roots of Black Travel in America

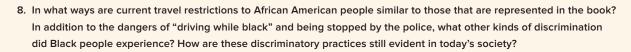
by CANDACY TAYLOR

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Overground Railroad combines personal narrative and United States history, presenting the harrowing trajectory of Black travel in the United States. This definitive narrative chronicles the *Green Book*'s importance as a guide whose mission was to keep Black people out of harm's way. Covering nearly four decades, Taylor also shows how the guide helped African Americans avoid humiliation in their travels and traces the social and physical mobility of Black Americans in the present day.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Throughout the book, what were the most common images or stories you associated with "driving while black"? How does the author's description align with or differ from those images or stories?
- 2. Discuss the book's title and how the dangers on the modern roads of the *Green Book* era (circa 1934–1970) were the same or different from the Underground Railroad during the slavery era.
- 3. The author presents *Green Book* publisher, Victor Hugo Green, in heroic terms, stating that the guide's longevity and success stem from his "vision, grit, creativity, and stamina." Was he a hero? Should he be regarded as important a publisher as John H. Johnson of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines?
- 4. Why do you think the Green Book lasted for decades, outlasting all of the other travel guides for African American people?
- 5. The author states that "given the violence that black travelers encountered on the road, the *Green Book* was an ingenious solution to a horrific problem." What other solutions could have been possible?
- 6. Of the many sites mentioned from the Jim Crow era, very few of them are still in existence. On the subject of integration, Florida activist Georgia Ayers states, "We got what we wanted, but we lost what we had." Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- 7. The author helps readers make connections between white supremacy and government policies that impacted the lives of Black people. How have times changed or remained the same?

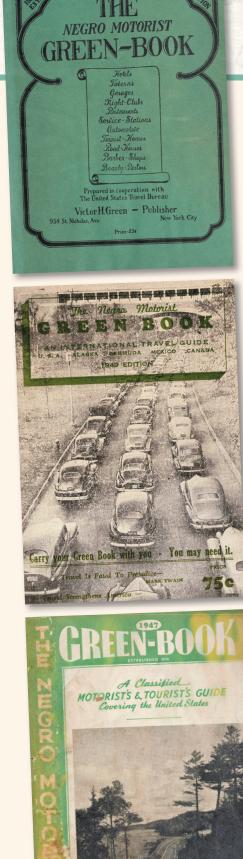




The GREEN BOOK and the ROOTS of BLACK TRAVEL in AMERICA CANDACY TAYLOR

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The Negro Travelers

Green



- 9. Why do you think the author used her stepfather's experiences to relay the dangers of travel for African American people? How did his life experiences parallel the broader historic experiences that Taylor discusses throughout the book?
- 10. What are some of the lessons the author learned from her stepfather?
- 11. On her experience while doing research to complete Overground Railroad, the author states, "The whole point of the Green Book was to keep black motorists safe on the road, and it's eighty years later and I can't find a safe place to use the bathroom." What other ironies are evident?
- 12. Discuss Green's decision to publish a list of Black colleges in the guide, during the 1940s.
- 13. Discuss Green's decision to add international travel to the guide.
- 14. How does this book compare with others that discuss the struggles and triumphs of African Americans?
- 15. Despite the dangers of the "overground railroad," due to the KKK and/or police, the author points to road trips and vacationing as activities that African American people associated with freedom. Is this still the case? Why or why not?
- 16. Many of the original Green Book sites are completely gone or deteriorated and unusable. Talk about the differences between the role these locations and businesses played during the Green Book era and what they symbolize in Black communities today. How can they be reimagined to become places of sanctuary once again?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES -

- Despite the dangers of the road, the good times rolled at many listed sites. The Dew Drop Inn, in New Orleans, was immortalized in a song by Little Richard. Listen to it here: Dew Drop Inn
- 2. Many of the sites were part of the chitlin circuit and/or catered to Black performers on the road. Harlem's 101 Ranch/Daisy Chain was an infamous sex club and hosted many musicians who went on to enjoy international fame such as Fats Waller and Count Basie, both of whom composed songs about the Daisy Chain. Listen to their songs here: The Daisy Chain | Count Basie, Valentine Stomp | Fats Waller
- 3. Murray's Dude Ranch in Victorville, CA, was the site where many Herb Jeffries movies were filmed. View footage from **The Bronze Buckaroo** and **Harlem Rides the Range**.

Guide written by Karen D. Taylor

