



Frequently Asked Questions

Oasis Spaces: The Green Book Project in North Carolina

When was the Jim Crow era?

The Jim Crow era began as Reconstruction came to an end in the 1870s and ran through the Civil Rights Movement up into the 1960s. During this time, many local governments constructed a legal system aimed at re-establishing a society based on white supremacy. These laws, known as Jim Crow laws, separated people of color from whites in schools, housing, jobs, and public gathering places.

Who was Jim Crow?

Jim Crow was the name of a fictional character in a minstrel show in the late 1820s. The popularity of the character led to the name becoming a derogatory nickname for African Americans and later a designation for segregated life.

Was segregation only in the southern states?

Though legal segregation was most common in the southern states, segregation could be found across the United States. In many places, even if there were not laws or signs barring people of color from spaces, they may still have been known not to serve or welcome them.

Were African Americans the only group impacted by Jim Crow laws in N.C.?

Though African Americans were the largest population impacted, American Indians were also included in segregation laws and customs which divided N.C. into multiple racial groups: white, "colored," and in some counties, "Indians."

What was the *Negro Motorist Green Book* and why is it often called the *Green Book*?

The Negro Motorist Green Book, later known as *The Negro Traveler's Green Book* in 1952, and the *Travelers' Green Book* in 1960, was a travel guide published between 1936 and 1966 that listed hotels, service stations, restaurants, and other places where African American travelers were welcomed. It was created by Victor Hugo Green, a postal worker from Harlem, New York City. Though the first edition focused on places welcoming of African Americans in New York City and its surrounding areas, it grew to cover the United States and even international destinations.

How did businesses get listed in the *Green Book*?

In the beginning, Victor Green used his network of fellow African American postal workers to find listings for the book. As it grew in popularity, so did listings through both word of mouth and businesses paying for advertisement space.

Where was the *Green Book* sold? How did people get it?

In the early years, it was distributed by Green's network of postal workers. Green also developed a partnership with the Esso (now Exxon) gasoline station chain. Esso was progressive for its time, selling franchises to African Americans and employing them in its corporate offices. Esso sold the guides in its service stations and advertised in its pages.

Was the *Green Book* just for motorists and vacation travel?

Though first called *The Negro Motorist Guide*, automobiles were a great expense and luxury. Many African Americans, especially during the early years of the *Green Book's* publication and in North Carolina, could not afford a car and relied on public transportation such as trains and buses. Much travel was also not done for leisure, but for work or family. The *Green Book* guides could identify safe places for food and lodging for travelers no matter their mode of travel, purpose, or distance.

Was the *Green Book* the only one of its kind?

Though it was one of the earliest, longest running, and more well-known African American travel guides, it gained competition as other individuals, organizations, and companies began to publish their own guides. Many built on the foundation of the *Green Book* by providing a tool for "vacation and recreation without humiliation."

How many *Green Book* sites in the United States were there?

Over the course of its publication, about 9,500 sites were listed. Of those, only about one third are still standing.

How many N.C. *Green Book* sites are there?

In N.C. there were 327 different sites featured in the *Green Book*.

Have all the N.C. *Green Book* sites been identified and found?

Due to the word of mouth nature of how businesses made it into the *Green Book*, not all listings were accurate. Some were listed on wrong roads, or even in the wrong town. Street names and neighborhoods changed over time. Though a lot of research has been done by consulting historic maps, newspapers, city directories, and oral histories, not every N.C. site listed has been located.

How many N.C. *Green Book* sites are still standing? How many are still in business?

To date, 66 physical structures have been identified as still standing across the state. Of these 66, four are still in operation: Speight's Auto Service in Durham, Friendly Barbershop in Durham, Magnolia House in Greensboro, and Dove's Auto Service in Kinston.

Why have so many *Green Book* sites been demolished?

This is a complex question with many possible reasons. One is due to an unintended consequence of integration – the decline of African American businesses. Businesses that before only had to compete against other African American businesses now had to compete against much bigger and more established businesses and chains. Many of these businesses did not survive the transition. Another possible reason so many sites have been lost is due to gentrification. This is especially common in the larger cities.

How can we protect *Green Book* sites that are still standing or recognize the ones that are not?

This is a great opportunity for citizens to get involved in their communities, and local government and/or organizations to build partnerships. The first step is to identify the sites that were in the community, and if still standing assess current condition and ownership. For ones still standing, communities should investigate if there are any local, state, or federal protections that can be applied for to prevent the possibility of future demolition. Fundraisers and grants may also help with building repairs or restoration. Communities should also look to see if there are ways local historical societies, museums, or libraries can build the sites' history into their programs through lectures, exhibits, and/or walking tours. Interpretive signage is also a great way to tell the history of sites and to mark the ones no longer standing.

Did anyone famous stay at/visit _____?

Depending on the location being asked about, the answer may be yes. Being a famous musician, film star, athlete, or politician did not protect someone from segregation. Newspaper articles often noted when someone famous was visiting the area, and sometimes even noted where they were staying. This was especially common when the Civil Rights Movement was front and center in the news. It was also not uncommon for a prominent local African American to put up VIPs in their own homes.

Why is _____ not listed in the *Green Book*?

Due to the word of mouth nature of how businesses got listed in the *Green Book*, it was not all encompassing and cover every location that was a safe space for African Americans. Some businesses may have been known on a local level, but just not on the national level or to those who had the ability to get it listed.

How can I read the *Green Book* today?

23 editions of the *Green Book* ranging from 1937 – 1966 are available to view online through the New York Public Library's Digital Collections. There are also several facsimile editions available to buy online.

