Geographic Locations of Listings in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* and Comparisons to Current African American Settlement Patterns

Elena Kavanaugh

**Overview:** *The Negro Motorist Green Book* was a guide for the African American road traveler published from 1936 to 1966. In the introduction, Victor Green, a former postman, explains: “…it has been our idea to give the Negro traveler information that will keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trip more enjoyable.” (Green, 1). During a time of segregation, the guide provided directory information for eateries, lodging, saloons, etc. in each state (plus neighboring countries) that would open their doors and provide a safe place for the “Negro traveler”.

A simple skim through the book will allow the reader to notice that some states have several more entries than others. Although geared for a traveler, does the number of entries for a given area in the guide correlate to the settlement patterns of African Americans in recent years? Given that the guide directed African Americans to safe places to visit, can we assume that these safe places were also desirable for permanent settlement? This lesson will allow students to map out listings from the guide and compare the results with maps that show current African American settlement patterns. This will lead the class to explore issues of movement and settlement in the U.S. with segregation/safety as push/pull factors.

**Essential Geographic Questions:** Does the number of listings for a given area in the *Green Book* correlate to the settlement patterns of African Americans in recent years?

**National Geography Standards:**
9: The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface
12: The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement

**Oregon Geography Content Standards**
5. Apply geographic skills, concepts, and technologies (e.g., maps, GIS, Google Earth) to gather, display, and analyze spatial information.

6. Analyze economic, social, human migration, settlement, and distribution patterns.

**Connections to Common Core**
6-8.RH.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
Objectives:

• Students will examine images and maps associated with segregation in order to observe and reflect on their landscape, place or region.

• Students will be able to refer to the Green Book to locate restaurants and lodging that served African Americans and plot them on a route from Chicago, Illinois to Mobile, Alabama.

• Students will compare the density of listings for a certain area from the Green Book to the distribution patterns of African American settlement from the 2010 census.

• Students will analyze some of the push/pull factors resulting from segregation.

• Students will make six comparisons for a certain state. They can use the following sentence frame as a guide: __________ (city, state) has a high/low population of African Americans and it has ____ (number) listings in the Green Book.

Grade Levels: Middle School

Time: two periods of 60 minutes

Materials:

• Black, red and blue pens (or any three colors of pens or pencils)
• Photos and maps for Gallery walk (attached, labeled A-K)
• Copy of Ruth and the Green Book by Calvin A. Ramsey
• Copies of Image Analysis Tool for Geography (attached)
• Copies of Questions for Discussion: Ruth and the Green Book (attached)
• Copies of the route from Chicago, Illinois to Mobile, Alabama (attached)
• Print copies of the maps at these two sites for each state or area you would like students to study if you do not have access to computers: http://demographics.coopercenter.org/DotMap/index.html (be sure to add map labels by clicking top left) and http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/greenbookmap.html.

Background:

Students in middle school social studies classes often cover U.S. history up through the Reconstruction. This is a lesson that could provide a look ahead at the end of their course, a glimpse of life for African Americans decades later. This lesson will also be the focus of enrichment classes that my school offers to students in grades 6-12 during Black History month.
At the high school level, this lesson would offer good background to the study of the Civil Rights movement.

Part of this lesson includes reading a picture book with the class, *Ruth and the Green Book*. Set in the 1950s, the story tells of Ruth, a young African-American girl who takes a trip with her parents from their home in Chicago to her grandmother’s in Alabama. The story begins with the excitement of her father’s bringing home a new car and the happy anticipation of their first trip in it. However, before the night falls on day one of their trip, the family has encountered some of the difficulties of travel in segregated America: “whites-only” signs, restrooms they are not permitted to use and refusal of a night’s lodging at a hotel. On the advice of an Esso station attendant two days later, they purchase a copy of The Negro Traveler’s Green Book. This guide provides listings of establishments that serve African-Americans. Ruth’s parents give her the task of locating food and lodging in the guide for their route, thus allowing her family a safe and happy conclusion to their voyage.

Although I have experienced very little resistance when I use a picture book in class with older students during twenty years of teaching, it could happen. However, I don’t think we are ever too old to learn something from a good children’s book.

**Procedures:**

**Day 1**

1. Pass out the Image Analysis Tool and read the directions for the Gallery Walk activity *(attached images labeled A-K)*.

2. Discuss: what did you observe? Let’s reflect. What are your questions?

3. Read *Ruth and the Green Book* while students answer the “Questions for Discussion”.

4. As a class, map the route of Ruth’s family on a wall map (or projected map on the computer screen).
   - Where do they begin? (Chicago)
   - What is their destination? (Alabama) Explain that since the city is unnamed, for this assignment we will use Mobile, Alabama.
   - Which states would they travel through?

5. Discuss the questions. The questions are comprehension level, their purpose being to simply highlight the events of Ruth’s family’s experience and provide background. Help students connect what Ruth’s family experienced to the photos they observed during the gallery walk activity. In regard to #9, it is worth mentioning the “Double V” movement during World War II: fighting for democracy and against racism at home and abroad. For #10, it is evident that Eddy believes that the route will become more dangerous from that point. Depending on your students, this could be a place where you could mention “sundown towns”, places where it was known that African Americans were unwelcome and usually in danger after dark.
6. Put students into pairs and pass out copies of the attached Chicago to Mobile Map. Have students go online to http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/9dc3ff40-8df4-0132-fd57-58d385a7b928/?uuid=9de48620-8df4-0132-4cfc-58d385a7b928 or hand out copies of the pages of the Green Book for Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama to each pair of students along with black, blue and red pens (or three different colors). Underline the cities the route passes through in black. Consult the Green Book and mark lodging with a red dot and food with a blue dot.

Day 2

1. Quick write + Discussion: “Take out a piece of paper and fold it down the middle. On one side write all the reasons you can think of that people MOVE FROM a place. On the other side list all the reasons you can think of that people MOVE TO a place.“

2. Share in pairs. Students can add to their lists if they are inspired from their discussion.

3. On the board, write PUSH FACTORS/ MOVE FROM on one side and PULL FACTORS/ MOVE TO on the other. Ask for student input from their writing, with an attempt to elicit corresponding push/pull factors (add to vocabulary journals).

4. Link the pull factor of “safety” to Ruth’s family in the story. “Segregation made certain places unsafe for African Americans. Would this make segregation a push or pull factor? What about safety, push or pull? Although they were just traveling, not moving, Ruth’s family was searching for safe places. If certain towns had safe places for African American travelers, do you think they are more likely to be places that African Americans would want to live in and settle down? I don’t know. Today we will see if we can find a connection.”

5. Assign student pairs a state. Student pairs will need to use their computers (examples attached in images J and K) and sit side by side. Tell students to choose A or B. Student A needs to consult the maps on this website for 2010 census information: http://demographics.coopercenter.org/DotMap/index.html (be sure to add map labels by clicking top left). Student B will consult the mapped Green Book listings at this site: http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/greenbookmap.html. Each student needs to zoom in on his or her state.

6. Students will write six comparisons for their state. They can use the following sentence frame as a guide: __________ (city, state) has a high/low population of African Americans and it has ____ (number) listings in the Green Book.

7. Students should lay their list of comparisons out and leave their computer open to the websites with their state visible. The students will be taking a gallery walk of their classmates’ results. Instruct them to not touch the computers.

8. With a paper and pen in hand, students should circulate, viewing other pairs’ states and wonder: write as many questions about what they observe as possible. It’s fine to give...
them examples: Why is ___ (city) so popular in 2010? Why are there so few African Americans settled in ___?

9. Back at their seats, ask students to put a + next to their comparisons that indicate a positive correlation (add to vocabulary journal) between Green Book listings and 2010 population. This is not a scientific study; explain that a formal study would require very precise measurements. Explain that today they are just seeing if it appears that having a lot of listings in 1956 is linked to a higher population in 2010. They can report out the number of +’s. Turn in the comparisons for review and assessment.

10. The questions generated in Step #8 can be the starting point for a discussion the next day and lead to research topics. In the meantime, finish the class off by having students take turns reading a question (don’t try to answer). Tell students if they like a question that they hear they should write it down. Have them turn in the questions for teacher review and safekeeping (if a research project will follow).

Assessment: After integrating visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts, students will plot listings on a map and make six comparisons for a given state. They will also evaluate whether or not the comparison shows a positive correlation.

Rubric:

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<th>Scoring Rubric</th>
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<td>Score x 2 = 30 points possible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will be able to refer to the Green Book to locate restaurants and lodging and plot them on a route.</td>
<td>Sites are clearly and thoroughly plotted and color-coded.</td>
<td>Sites are mostly clearly and thoroughly plotted and color-coded.</td>
<td>Sites are somewhat clearly and thoroughly plotted and color-coded.</td>
<td>Some sites are plotted and perhaps color-coded.</td>
<td>Few sites are plotted and perhaps color-coded.</td>
<td>Not attempted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will make six comparisons for a given area.</td>
<td>There are six well-written comparisons.</td>
<td>There are four or five well-written comparisons.</td>
<td>There are three well-written comparisons.</td>
<td>There are two to three comparisons.</td>
<td>There is one comparison.</td>
<td>Not attempted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will determine which comparisons show a positive correlation.</td>
<td>Students were able to find a positive correlation where it applied.</td>
<td>Students were only able to find a positive correlation where it applied some of the time.</td>
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<td>Not attempted</td>
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Extensions and/or Adaptations:

• Students plan a multi-state trip using the Green Book to experience a walk in other’s shoes.
• Students research questions that they came up with in Day 2 Step #8.
• Students follow up with their comparisons to determine more precise numbers.
• Students research “sundown towns”, places where it was known that African Americans were unwelcome and usually in danger after dark. (older students). [http://sundown.afro.illinois.edu/content.php?file=sundowntowns-whitemap.html]
• Students research the Double V (Double Victory) Movement in WWII
• If students are working on family history, a precursor activity could have them interview a grandparent (or someone born before 1960) about a long road trip and map it out.

Sources:


Bubley, Esther. *A rest stop for Greyhound bus passengers on the way from Louisville, Kentucky, to Nashville, Tennessee, with separate accommodations for colored passengers.* 1943. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observe</th>
<th>Reflect</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>What words are on the image?</td>
<td>What place or region does this image show?</td>
<td>How do the clothing, buildings, transportation and/or landscape reflect the economic, political, or societal conditions for the time when the image was created?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What types of buildings are in the image?</td>
<td>What is the most likely purpose (audience) for this image?</td>
<td>Why is this image significant?</td>
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<td>Describe the landscape and physical features in the image.</td>
<td>What inferences or connections can you make from the image?</td>
<td>Would it be difficult to find the location of this image? Explain why or why not.</td>
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Questions for Discussion: *Ruth and the Green Book*

1) Where does Ruth’s family live?
2) What is the destination of their trip?
3) What preparations does her mother make for the trip?
4) Does the gas station sell them gas?
5) What are they not allowed to do at the gas station?
6) What do they do the first night?
7) Where did they eat the next day? Why?
8) Where did they stay their first night in Tennessee?
9) While Daddy and Eddy were talking at night, Daddy said, “He had hoped that the ___ had changed things, but now he could see he was wrong.”
10) When they leave, who/what does Eddy warn them about?
11) Where do they get the *Green Book*?
12) What are the first places Ruth looked for in the *Green Book*?
13) According to Ruth, traveling could be ____. 
TEACHER’S GUIDE Questions for Discussion: *Ruth and the Green Book*

The questions are comprehension level, their purpose being to simply highlight the events of Ruth’s family’s experience and provide background. The individual teacher may add higher-level questions to fit her or his needs.

1) Where does Ruth’s family live? (Chicago)
2) What is the destination of their trip? (Alabama, Grandma’s house)
3) What preparations does her mother make for the trip? (cooks all week long)
4) Does the gas station sell them gas? (yes)
5) What are they not allowed to do at the gas station? (use the bathroom)
6) What do they do the first night? (hotel denied them; they drove then slept alongside the road in the car)
7) Where did they eat the next day? Why? (picnics; restaurants said “whites only”)
8) Where did they stay their first night in Tennessee? (Daddy’s friends Eddy and Alice’s house)
9) While Daddy and Eddy were talking at night, Daddy said *he had hoped that the ___ had changed things, but now he could see he was wrong.* (war)
10) When they leave, who does Eddy warn them about? (Jim Crow)
11) Where do they get the Green Book? (at an Esso station)
12) What are the first places Ruth looked for in the Green Book? (a repair shop and an inn)
13) According to Ruth, traveling could be ___. (scary)
A.

http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8c10428/
Lewis Mountain in Shenandoah National Park, Virginia.

E.

http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b46051/
I.

The Negro Motorist
GREEN BOOK
AN INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL GUIDE
U. S. A. - ALASKA - BERMUDA - MEXICO - CANADA
1949 EDITION

Carry your Green Book with you - You may need it.

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Travel Strengthens America —

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http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/9dc3ff40-8df4-0132-fd57-58d385a7b928
J. (optional)

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K. (optional)
Chicago to Mobile Map

13 h 28 min
888 miles

13 h 26 min
888 miles