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Dark travel: exhuming the racialised transit gaps beneath twentieth-century travel maps

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Abstract

During the Jim Crow era and its aftermath, the routes depicted on typical interstate highway maps took on an alternative meaning for African American travellers. Unlike the *Green Book*, an essential travel glossary for Black travellers in 1930s–1960s USA, maps systematically ignored one crucial layer: where Black people could safely or legally drive, sleep or fill up with petrol. The network of roads designed to represent an infrastructure of 'American freedom' became effective dead ends for Black travellers. In this article (and accompanying collage series using original 1958 ESSO road maps), I argue that the invisibility of racialised transportation routes on government and commercial travel maps allowed American policymakers, urban planners and transportation engineers to escape culpability for their participation in financing an inherently racist world-building project.

Victor H. Green's *Negro Motorist Green Book* (1936–66) is an essential primary source to dispute this. However, the *Negro Motorist Green Book* was only optionally accompanied by maps (often provided by 'benevolent' corporate partners, like the ESSO petrol company) and these failed to visualise the safe travel routes and racialised infrastructure gaps that the business listings in the *Green Book* itself exposed. Representational cartography is one of the most potent tools for fomenting a common understanding of cultural and economic histories. Unlike the visual archive of housing discrimination provided by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation's 'redlining' maps, historians and geographers lack similar cartographic proof that transportation infrastructure equally circumscribed African Americans' social and physical mobility. This article illustrates how a lack of representational maps have allowed the USA to cement these stratified networks into its landscapes for nearly a century thus far.

Keywords critical mapping; *Negro Motorist Green Book*; transportation planning; racial segregation; Black mobility; third places

Introduction

Maps are windows into the past and often, when wielded by those in power, blueprints of the future. In contemporary North America, the lasting political power of maps is on peak display when cartographers compare the spatialised demographics of current United States cities to the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board's residential security maps (Figure 1). Thanks in part to the commercial success of Ta-Nehisi Coates's 2014 article 'The Case for Reparations' and Richard Rothstein's 2017 book *The Color of Law*, redlining's contributions to America's lasting residential segregation became widely recognised as 'racism and white supremacy in full 1930s, *Wizard of Oz* technicolor'.¹ The devastating impact of these financial and policy decisions, facilitated by the simple act of etching boundaries and colour-coding neighbourhoods, stands as compelling evidence of the creative and destructive power of widely distributed maps.²

The visual clarity of these 'technicolor' artefacts of America's segregationist social policy makes them fit to grace the cover of Rothstein's *New York Times* bestselling book (Figure 2) and to appear on the slides of just about every lecture I have attended since 2010 that references urban planning and race in America. The rhetorical power of these maps is immense: correlations between the 'grades' assigned by twentieth-century 'residential security' maps and the contours of twenty-first-century racial segregation spontaneously appear each time one superimposes a contemporary demographic, public health or household income map with those used by banks to determine mortgage lending from the 1930s.³

But, as many scholars who rely on these redlining maps to communicate with diverse audiences will point out, residential security maps only tell one part of the story about the ossification of racial inequality in America.⁴ These maps do not tell us about the everyday social and legal practices that the public and private sectors used to maintain a racial hierarchy in twentieth-century USA. Nor do they illuminate the strategies that visible minorities employed to navigate this environment (and even transcend its hostility to carve out spaces of abundance and joy). However, even if redlining cannot answer these questions alone, other diverse forms of maps can play an important role in enhancing our understanding.

Figure 1. 'Hagstrom's Map of Brooklyn' and the Area D8 description accompanying this 1938 residential security map, from the National Archives 'City Survey Files, 1935–1940' Collection. Source: University of Richmond, Mapping Inequality: Redlining in America

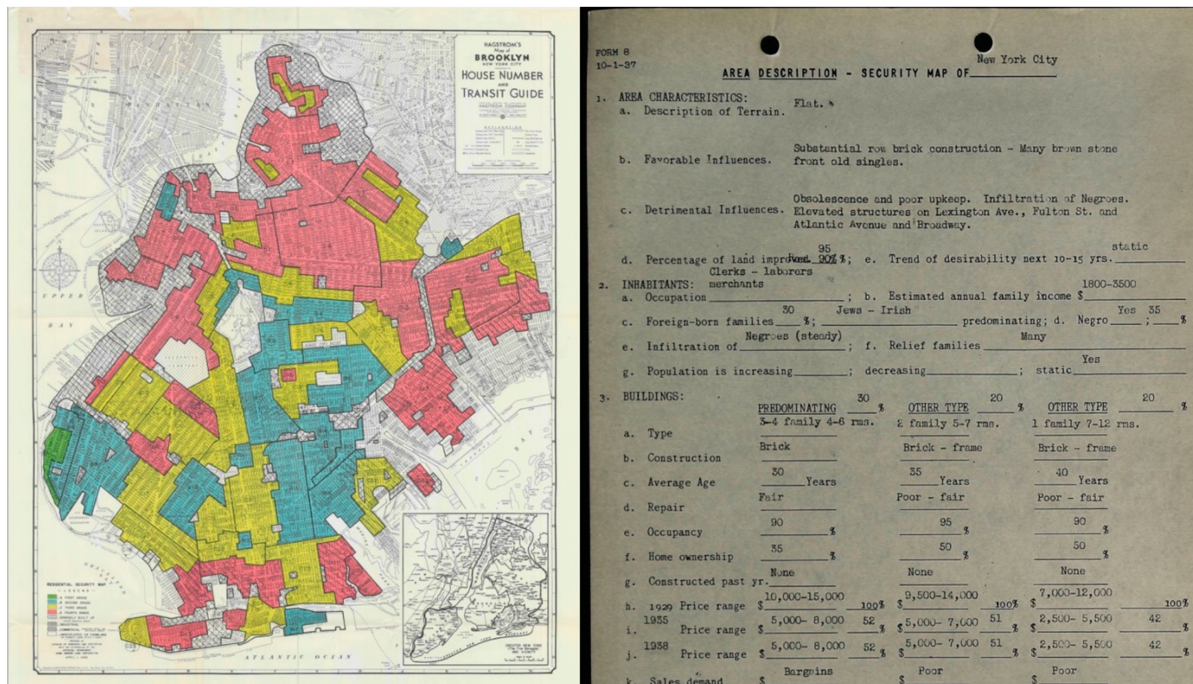
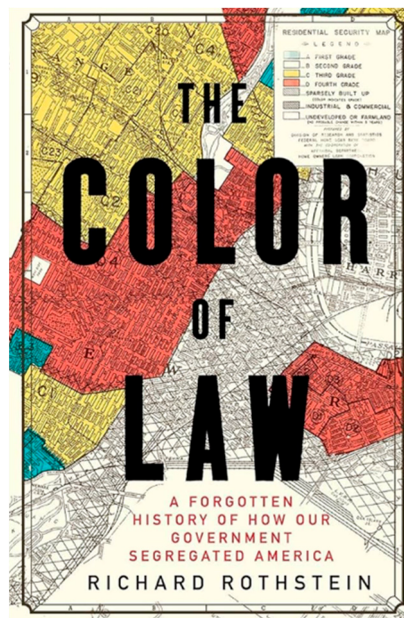


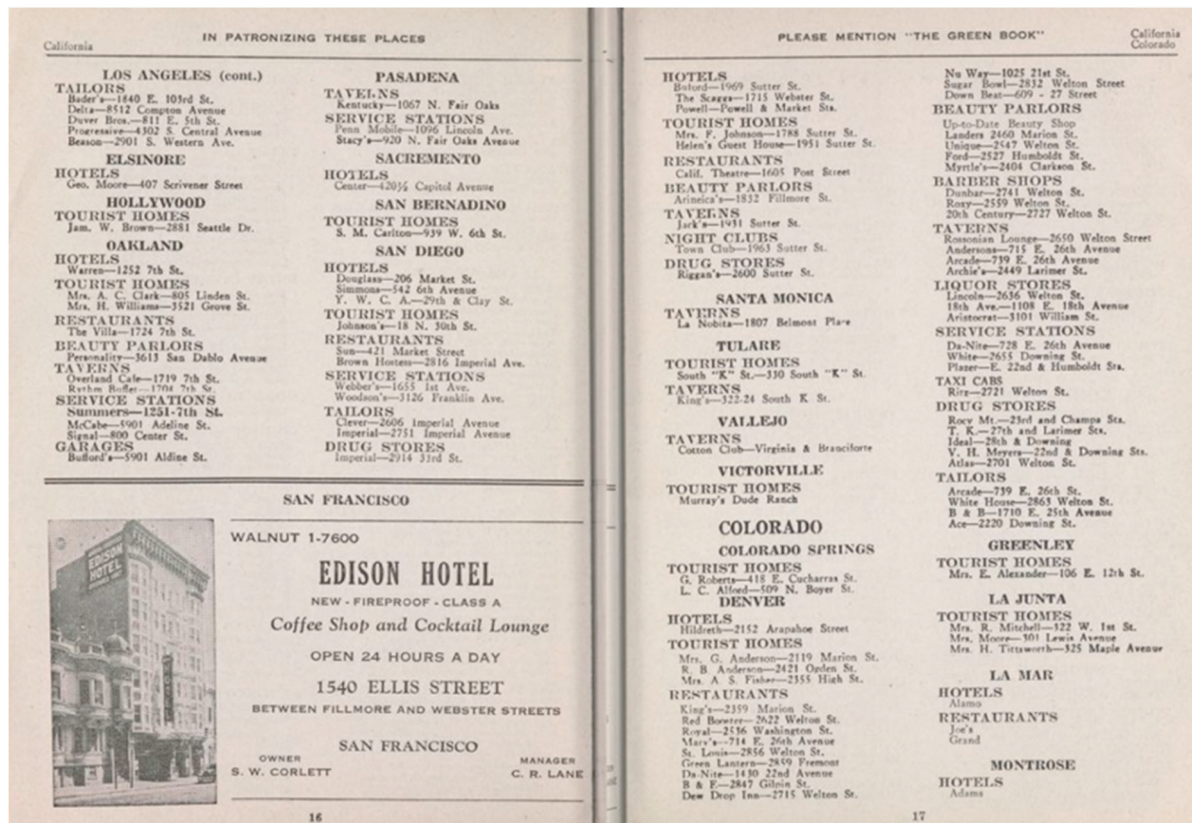
Figure 2. A residential security map on the cover of Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law*, 2017. Source: Economic Policy Institute



One significant piece of this story, I argue, is preserved within a series of artefacts called *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (thereafter referred to as the *Green Book*; Figure 3). In the following pages, I discuss the significance of the geographical and historical data embedded in this annually distributed handbook for African American travellers. By referencing the work of critical geographers and cultural

scholars like Sarah Elwood, Mishuana Goeman, Katharine Harmon, Walis Johnson, Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, I explain not just how the *Green Book* enriches our understanding of the social and cultural impacts of racist legal and urban-planning frameworks, but also how it dismantles the illusion that investment in American infrastructure has achieved equitable or post-racial status even today. I then explore creative (or critical) cartographic methods to enhance the general public's understanding of the *Green Book*'s geospatial significance. But first, I discuss the historical context and impact of the *Green Book*.

Figure 3. Pages from *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, 1948. Source: New York Public Library Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture



The past

History and legacy of the *Green Book*

The *Green Book* is far less well-known than HOLC's residential security maps. Even Yoruba Richen, now one of the leading public scholars of the *Green Book* and director of a critically acclaimed documentary, admits to being unaware of the guidebook into adulthood.⁵ 'A lot of people don't know about the *Green Book* even though they are Black, or they might have heard of it and not really known what it is,'⁶ emphasises Lawrence Phillips, the creator of a twenty-first-century *Green Book* spin-off for international tourists, when discussing the resonance of the original guidebooks with contemporary Black travellers. Published from 1936 to 1966 *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (later called *The Negro Travelers' Green Book*) provided African American travellers with a directory of safe rest stops as they drove throughout the United States. Founded by Victor H. Green, the publication's namesake, the *Green Book* became a staple for travellers seeking restaurants, hotels and petrol stations that would not deny entry to or harass Black travellers on the basis of skin colour.

Despite the apparent drawbacks of widespread automobile dependency today, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) president and law professor Deborah N. Archer writes that 'the ability to drive on the interstate highways offered Black people a certain amount of freedom from the oppression they experienced on public transportation'.⁷ Black travellers were notoriously forced to sit or stand separately, and 'one of the places that African-American women were most vulnerable was on public transportation or on train stations because they could not—they didn't have access to the facilities and had to go in the open sometimes'.⁸ There were slight differences between northern and southern regions owing to the legal landscape. My grandfather, for example, would have to move from the integrated train cars to the segregated cars for 'Negroes' when he crossed the Mason–Dixon line on trips from New York City to Washington, DC. However, the freedom to drive a private automobile in DC and Maryland afforded a sense of safety necessary for social mobility. The need for safety became ingrained even in consumer decisions. My grandparents only drove Cadillacs and later told us that, owing to the brand's advertised low risk of breaking down in hostile territory, Cadillacs were marketed to African Americans as the safest option. Purchasing a copy of the *Green Book* added an additional layer of safety for Black travellers when they did have to step out of their cars, whether in the Jim Crow South or the sundown-town-peppered North.

What if the *Green Book* were a map?

Now digitised by the New York Public Library's (NYPL) Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, these booklets are more than a tourist guide – they serve as an artefact of the robust network of places where Black travellers could maintain their dignity along the open road. Cultural creators Yoruba Richen's film and Candacy Taylor's photo and interview archives add colour and depth to the lists of addresses featured in the *Green Book*'s annual publications. They give life to otherwise lost memories of neighbourhoods like Five Points in Denver, Colorado, which had such a thriving concentration of Black-owned businesses that it was often called 'The Harlem of the West'.⁹ And, while highlighting the significant investments Black people and their allies made towards building welcoming accommodation for Black travellers, they also highlight the significant dangers that Black travellers faced (and continue to face) on America's highway network.

However, there remains a significant gap between the compelling visual artefacts provided by Yoruba Richen's documentary footage and Candacy Taylor's photo archive and the heavily quantitative process of extracting addresses from the *Green Book* to make a Geospatial Information System (GIS) spatial dataset. So, is there a way for a map of the *Green Book* to compellingly spatialise the story told by the long lists of text contained within its pages (Figure 3)?

Recent efforts to geolocate addresses in the *Green Book* also point to the spaces in between, begging the question: what happened along the roads between these points on the map? This article lifts its title from (and attempts to respond to) Professor Michael Ra-shon Hall's 2015 call to action, which asserts the:

potential of dark travel and tourism studies to not only address geographical and memorial sites marked by violence, death, grief, and trauma but to also account for those dark bodies whose very skin colour as racial signifier marked (and often continues to mark) them as targets of violence, intimidation, insult and at times fatal assault in travel and transportation.¹⁰

By developing creative, multimedia methods for spatialising the rich historical and ethnographic data collected by Yoruba Richen, Candacy Taylor and other dedicated *Green Book* documentarians, artist-made maps of the *Green Book* can become a key source for such 'dark travel' studies.

Dead ends and open roads

In her 2020 essay for the *Vanderbilt Law Review*, Deborah Archer writes of the devastation wrought on Black neighbourhoods by transportation agencies' notorious pattern of driving new highways through Black commercial centres. Candacy Taylor notes the lasting devastation of transportation planning decisions, which is not visible on administrative transportation maps:

Once I hit the road scouting *Green Book* listings, I drove nearly forty thousand miles on America's two-lane highways ... I also passed miles of blight and boarded-up buildings in

Baltimore, Detroit, Chicago, and Cleveland. After seeing communities decimated by poverty, crime, and destructive government policies, I was bewildered, brokenhearted, and then furious that human beings were living in such inhumane conditions.¹¹

While traditional methods of data collection (and visualisation) can quantify the financial impacts of these losses and even geolocate the now-destroyed centres of Black life, they often fail to depict the qualities of the Black spaces and communities that the United States Interstate Highway System tore apart. In her research on critical cartography (an alternative to traditional mapping and data visualisation strategies), Sarah Elwood critiques 'the paradoxical relation of digital data, in which Black people are often invisible yet hyper-visible' and the data-gathering methods 'of capture/control and valuation/devaluation that interpolate Black lives through white supremacy'.¹² The *Green Book* gives depth to the aspects of Black life, business ownership and travel that are otherwise invisible in 'residential security' maps and other cartographic resources that often take an outsized role in constructing spatial narratives about racism in the built environment of twentieth-century America.

But the story told by 'residential security' maps, which exhibit only three layers of data (land uses and developed versus undeveloped land boundaries with limited topography; street networks and neighbourhood names; and colour-coded residential security ratings) can be easily misinterpreted to imply that racist practices in the investment in, and maintenance of, public and private infrastructure ceased to exist after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, or that only housing patterns were affected. Finding multimedia visual strategies that deepen the stories told by maps can help dismantle the illusion that investment in American infrastructure has achieved equitable or post-racial status even today.

The closest existing relatives to a *Green Book* map are the ubiquitous fold-out road maps (Figure 4) used by American drivers through the early 2000s (Google Maps was launched in 2005). When Victor H. Green started publishing his directory, ESSO was the only gas station that served Black drivers throughout the nation, and the company began stocking *Green Books* and giving away their road maps.¹³ These road maps, of course, did not denote how many of the pathways in them were useless, or even dangerous for Black travellers, potentially leaving them stranded if lulled into thinking that all the roads on ESSO's maps were really free to them. Thus, this freedom from oppression was not complete. The open roads depicted on ESSO's supplementary maps were, in fact, riddled with dead ends.

Figure 4. 1950s ESSO road maps



I have only a few memories of driving down south with my family before these road maps became redundant, but those memories are sprinkled with the voices of my parents saying: 'Be careful. We don't want to risk our car breaking down here.' When travelling, I was hyper-aware of our Blackness from a young age, even despite never being attacked or turned away from a rest stop. My mother attributes this anxiety to the fact that we still harbour the memories of a more frightening period. And yet she jokes today that she wishes Google Maps had a *Green Book* GPS add-on that could announce, 'If you're Black, it might be safer to go this way instead...'

To understand the experience of encountering one of those hidden dead ends that the *Green Books* indicate, and road maps miss, I wanted to put myself in the shoes of a traveller from 1956 (Figure 5). In Yoruba Richen's own documentary film and in interviews, she highlights the particular need for Victor H. Green's travel guide in the northern and western states: 'It was much harder to navigate in the North and the West because you didn't have the signs ... You didn't know what places were dangerous and what places you weren't supposed to go into.'¹⁴ Fulfilling the need to use the bathroom could be particularly harrowing in the South as well. My aunt recalls my grandparents instructing the children to find places to relieve themselves behind the bushes on the side of the road, but she did not understand why until adulthood. 'You used the *Green Book* to figure out where you could [use the bathroom],' notes Yoruba Richen.¹⁵

Figure 5. 'Negro [sic] driver asleep under a truck. There are no sleeping accommodations for Negroes at this service station. On U.S. 1.' Photo by Jack Delano, 1940. Source: Library of Congress. <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017748161>



Candacy Taylor reflects on the persistence of these metaphorical 'dead ends' for Black drivers well into the twenty-first century. Her own accounts of 'driving while Black' while researching the book in 2017 are harrowing: 'On the road, I was verbally threatened, chased by dogs, physically lunged at, and nearly physically assaulted,'¹⁶ she recounts. 'I thought, isn't this ironic? 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.'¹⁷ Clearly, today's navigation apps have not yet figured out how to help Black Americans safely navigate the country's hostile social landscapes, replicating ESSO road maps' missing layer of information.

The present: contextualising the *Green Book*'s impact today

Recent academic and cultural discourse

Cultural workers, research institutions and public scholars like Candacy Taylor have led the charge in revisiting the *Green Book*'s significance, with impact in these three areas: (a) preserving photographic and oral histories of travelling with the *Green Book* in museum and library collections; (b) revitalising historic properties; and (c) geolocating the addresses from the *Green Book*. Cultural contributions include the Smithsonian's travelling and virtual *Green Book* exhibitions in collaboration with Candacy Taylor, the Library of Congress's 'Occupational Folk Life' series of histories about the *Green Book* (also conducted by Candacy Taylor), the Gilmore Car Museum's award-winning *Green Book* exhibition and William Daryl Williams's travelling exhibition 'Places of Refuge: The Dresser Trunk Project'. In 2016, the popular 99% *Invisible* podcast released a series of episodes on the *Green Book*, among others. Since 2015, the Historic Hampton House Hotel in Miami, Florida, and the A.G. Gaston Motel in Birmingham, Alabama, both listed in the *Green Book*, have been designated as national historic sites and have undergone extensive restoration projects.¹⁸

Catalysts for the *Green Book*'s newfound cultural resonance

Not all recent mainstream depictions of the *Green Book* have been accurate, as demonstrated by the widely criticised¹⁹ (despite its Academy Award for 'Best Picture') 2018 Peter Farrelly period film titled *Green Book*. But, despite its watered-down portrayal of twentieth-century racism, 'perpetuat[ion of] the mythology that racism and segregation is just in the South'²⁰ and directorial decisions to show only the most unflattering *Green Book* locations,²¹ the reverberations afforded by its Hollywood budget and reach were helpful: 'I will say that I'm pleased about the timing of all of this, because the movie came out, now more people have heard of the *Green Book*, and they can watch [my] film and go deeper and learn more about the actual history behind it,'²² said Yoruba Richen about the Hollywood film in 2019. Charitable organisations have done just that. For example, as part of their diversity, equity and inclusion training in 2024, the United Way of Central Indiana staff watched Yoruba Richen's documentary.²³

The missteps of Peter Farrelly's film have been, in some ways, rectified by the timing of Yoruba Richen and Candacy Taylor's carefully researched literary and film contributions, pointing towards the importance of combining academic research with cultural and artistic production to 'set the record straight' and counter the impact of misleading popular culture representations that risk minimising the strength of Black leadership and the extent of racism on America's road network. Yoruba Richen's documentary film work has prompted viewers to remember how:

[Their] family was using the *Green Book* and only going to the places that were designated. And they did. They had to prepare for these long journeys ... we've had people stand up after the screenings and talk about how they remember, you know, their mom wrapping the fried chicken to bring on the road and the fruit that they would bring.²⁴

These opportunities for the public to re-engage with the *Green Book*'s legacy have been a catalyst for the *Green Book*'s newfound cultural resonance, support for related research endeavours and reckonings about the persistent dangers of travelling while Black in the twenty-first-century United States.

Cultural reverberations and contemporary *Green Books*

Owing in part to the highly publicised lynchings of Black Americans between 2012 and 2020, a heightened awareness of the dangers of 'travelling while Black' has re-emerged. In 2017, for example, the NAACP released a travel advisory for the state of Missouri, articulating that 'individuals traveling in the state are advised to travel with extreme caution. Race, gender and color-based crimes have a long history in Missouri.'²⁵ The travel advisory, the first of its kind on a state or national level, was issued after what the NAACP State Conference Office referred to as the 'Jim Crow Bill' was passed in 2017. The travel advisory remains in effect in 2025, nearly seven years later, and recounts frightening patterns of racial violence against travellers in Missouri at the time it was first issued:

The NAACP wants to make Missourians and our visitors aware of looming danger which could include the following by example of what has happened to some residents and visitors:

Tory Sanford who recently died in a jail cell but was never arrested after running out of gas when he traveled into the state accidentally; Racist attacks on University of Missouri students while on the state's campuses as the University of Missouri System spoke in favor of Romine's Jim Crow Bill;

Missouri's legislature Representative Rick Bratton argued that homosexuals are not human beings according to his faith; Black high school students in St. Louis have been attacked with hot glue while denigrated racially;

Two internationally born men gunned down outside in Kansas City after their killer thought them to be Muslim; According to the Missouri Attorney General African Americans in Missouri are subjected to excessive traffic [stops] 75% more likely to be stopped and searched based on skin color than Caucasians; Public threats of shooting 'Blacks' that terrorized University of Missouri students and members of the public.²⁶

These real levels of danger and discomfort have inspired efforts not only to document the rates of racial bias in policing and peer violence but also to develop new resources that protect Black travellers. Rutgers University's United Black Council released 'The Greenbook: The Black Rutgers Resource Manual' in 2020 to help incoming students navigate the university safely.²⁷ *Green Book* spin-offs are also taking hold at the national (and international) level. In a review of the former IT consultant Lawrence Phillips's 'Green Book Global' website, journalist Paris Achen notes that, of 5,000 Black travellers surveyed, 42 per cent felt unwelcome at their travel destination in the United States. Users of 'Green Book Global'²⁸ can leave helpful comments about the cities and businesses they visit to guide future travellers. For example, one user wrote in 2023:

As with any city, Boston has its fair share of trouble and being aware of your surroundings is a must, South Boston is where you may experience racism, but for the most part it's mild and passive. Dorchester and Roxbury are the heart of Black peoples Boston. You'll find a lot of history and banging food there.²⁹

Efforts to preserve Black-owned businesses and architectural heritage are also gaining attention at the state and regional level. In 2022, the United States National Park Service launched its 'Green Book Project' with the intention to 'promote ongoing understanding, preservation and commemoration of [Green Book] sites'³⁰ along Route 66. A previous study referenced by the National Park Service revealed that only 33 per cent of *Green Book* sites in the communities intersected by Route 66 were still standing.³¹ In 2021, the University of Virginia celebrated the work of three alumni who aimed to place a particular emphasis on the architectural integrity of *Green Book* buildings in the state of Virginia, stating that 'at this point we're thinking of them as places of resistance during segregation'.³² Their efforts are gaining traction with the successful entry of 300 *Green Book* sites onto Preservation Virginia's '2021 Most Endangered Historic Places' list.³³

Existing mapping efforts

Recently, the NYPL Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has made a set of interactive maps available to the public. These maps leverage previous efforts by the University of South Carolina Digital Collections' geolocation of over 1,500 listings from the 1956 *Green Book*.³⁴ The map enables users to zoom in and out on individual *Green Book* locations or to view clusters of *Green Book* locations as a heat map (Figure 6). An additional interactive tool, entitled 'Map a Trip' (Figure 7), functions like MapQuest, showing users speculative 1947 or 1956 travel routes and where they might stop along the way.

Since the NYPL Schomburg Center first published its digitised collection of the *Green Book* in 2016 (and subsequently launched the interactive map) a variety of independent and institutional *Green Book* mapping projects have cropped up. In 2019, to coincide with a screening and Q&A for Yoruba Richen's documentary, the Michigan State University Library launched an exhibition and interactive map of 86 Detroit businesses featured across nine editions of the *Green Book*.³⁵ And, in 2022, the South Carolina African American Heritage Foundation (now the WeGOJA Foundation) published its interpretation of a modern *Green Book* to highlight African American cultural destinations within the state of South Carolina.³⁶

Figure 6. 1956 Heat Map view in the 'Navigating the Green Book' interactive tool, September 2024 screenshot. Source: NYPL Schomburg Center and NYPL Labs

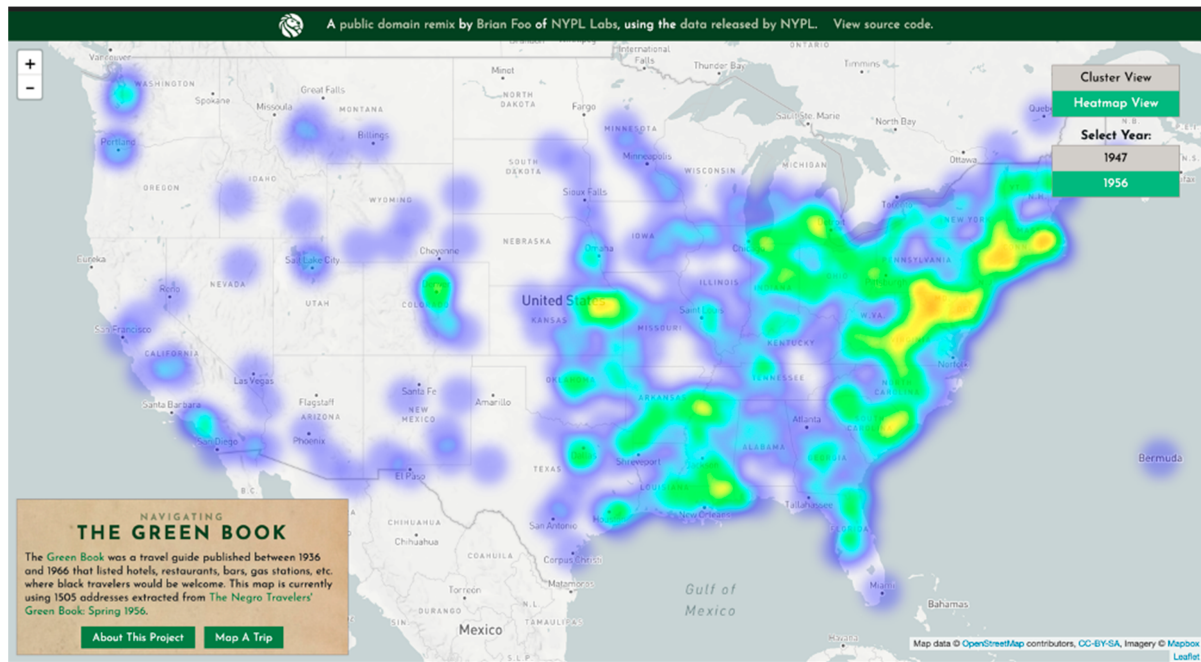
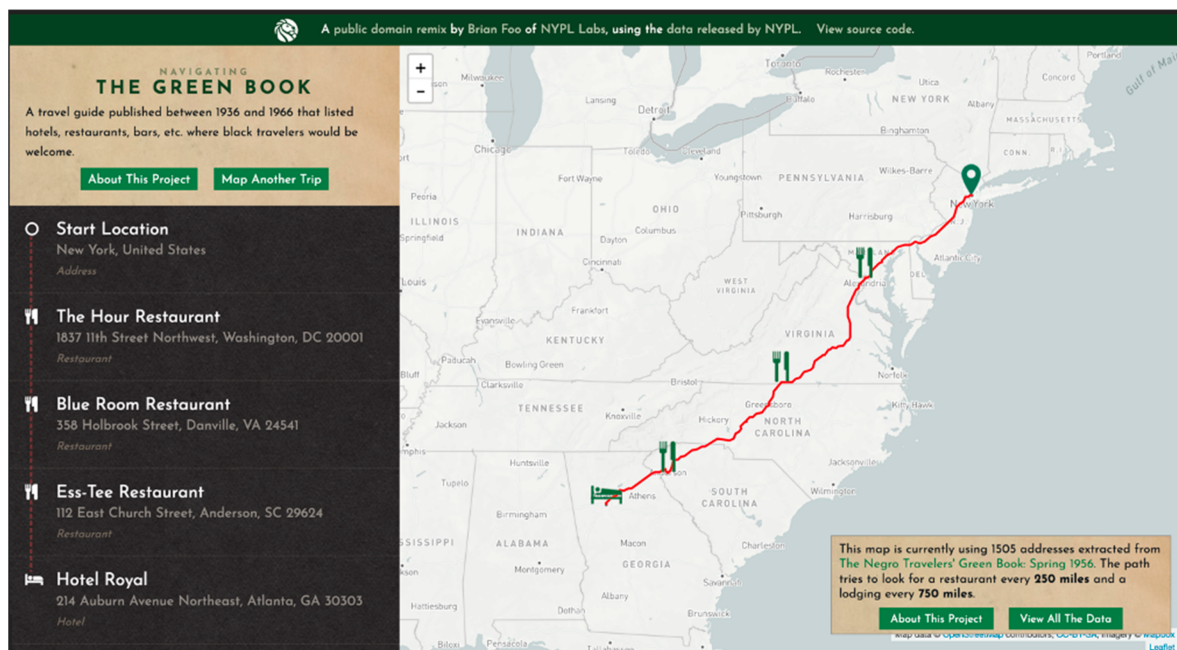


Figure 7. 'Map A Trip' view in the 'Navigating the Green Book' interactive tool, September 2024 screenshot of a route from New York, NY to Atlanta, GA. Source: NYPL Schomburg Center and NYPL Labs



Secondary schools have also been leveraging the NYPL's digitisation efforts for educational purposes. In 2021, the Environmental Science Research Institute's (ESRI) ArcGIS Online Competition for American secondary school students presented an award to Skye Lam of the Bronx High School of Science for their

StoryMap entitled 'Mapping the Green Book in New York City'.³⁷ Online marketplaces like Teachers Pay Teachers and Twinkl, which allow educators to create and sell curriculum templates, now feature at least two *Green Book* mapping projects for middle school and high school social studies students.³⁸

Remapping the *Green Book*

So, returning to Michael Ra-shon Hall's call to action, how can the digital mapping efforts discussed above be leveraged to tell dynamic visual stories about the alterity Black travellers experienced (and continue to experience) along the United States' road network? This question requires an exploration of alternative creative (or critical) cartographic methods that can enhance the general public's understanding of the *Green Book's* geospatial significance and not just highlight the business addresses listed in the *Green Book* but also give life to memories on the roads that connect NYPL's heat map clusters and all the blank spaces in between.

As devilish as their impact on American housing infrastructure was, the HOLC left behind clear images that we could use to hold them accountable for the financial devastation with which the 'red', otherwise known as 'hazardous' zones, would mark America's Black neighbourhoods. Of course, it is too simple to blame a single actor. Even with the HOLC maps, history professor Robert Gioielli points out that 'emphasis on the federal sponsorship of the HOLC maps and segregationist residential policy masks how local private actors in every American city fully endorsed, sponsored, and assisted with the design and implementation of redlining policies'.³⁹ However, the *Green Book* provides a robust account of an alternative American landscape that an empowered class of Black Americans worked hard to build and navigate. However, urban and transportation planners have yet to embrace these materials as a geospatial database of what it feels like to travel in the USA as a Black person in the past, present and future.

The future: learning from the *Green Book*

Urban design and transportation policy implications

Transportation and policy scholars have made considerable efforts to document and understand the negative impacts of discriminatory transportation investments on communities of colour. A 2023 article for the ACLU reflects on how 'the ripple effects of these highway projects were immediate and far-reaching ... No aspect of neighborhood life and culture went untouched. Healthy food became scarce. Businesses failed. Job opportunities diminished. The housing market cratered'.⁴⁰ But, as Deborah Archer's writing asserts, the United States still lacks clear and dependable policy pathways towards rectifying inequality in future transportation investments.⁴¹ In 2021, then transportation secretary Pete Buttigieg publicly acknowledged that the 'racism physically built into some of our highways'⁴² was intentional. The Biden administration's 'Reconnecting Communities' pilot programme, which awarded nearly US\$4 billion in grants for highway caps or removal, public transit, bike or pedestrian paths and green spaces from 2022 to 2024 quickly followed.⁴³ However, critics have acknowledged that these investments are still not enough.⁴⁴

It is critical to think about who gets consulted about changes to transportation policy. Transit agencies across the country have been accused of continuing to segregate riders well into the twenty-first century through bus and metro routing and policing. In an article for Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Christof Spieler claims:

Transit agencies concluded that to attract 'choice riders' they needed to design for ... 'white comfort.' Those choice riders come to board meetings and talk about wanting to feel safe. Choice riders don't want to be around vagrants or people who seem 'sketchy.' (And we all know what that can be code for.)⁴⁵

The imbalance of rider perspectives presented to transit agencies (and the subtly embedded racism in some of their comments) points to missing perspectives from Black travellers, which could have been gained both from traditional methods of community engagement and research into archival records like the *Green Book*. Having Black travellers' perspectives (both past and present) represented on a mapped version of the *Green Book* could be an invaluable addition to the maps typically consulted by transportation planners.

So, how can a map of the *Green Book* help inform a new era of anti-racist urban and streetscape design? To answer that question, we must consider that urban and transportation planners and designers seek to base all their decisions on a robust combination of data and accepted planning ideals. If the data (including historic planning documents, geographic information and community input) does not include the spatial narratives of Black travellers, any future plans will inevitably fail to address the needs of (or rectify the harm to) this population. Alphonse Tam and the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy include in their call for 'An Antiracist Future for Our Highways' a reminder that 'agencies should also make sure that critical data sources are representative of the most vulnerable groups'.⁴⁶ This emphasises the importance of community leadership directing policy and urban design strategies for community healing, which is also echoed by the Brookings Institution⁴⁷ and the American Planning Association (APA).

Urban planner Nicolia Robinson wrote a four-step guide on behalf of the APA in 2020 with recommendations on creating inclusive and anti-racist versions of Ray Oldenburg's *third place*, 'where individuals from all walks of life can share and connect. To achieve this, we must ask: Who are we programming for? And who better to ask than the community itself?'⁴⁸ Many recent highway removal projects point to the third places (some of which were documented in the *Green Book*) stewarded by African Americans and later demolished by transportation planners in the twentieth century. In the United States, where some of our only spontaneous daily interactions with strangers take place on sidewalks, street corners and public transit, the public right of way begins to perform as its own third place. Thus, the only function of our road networks is not to move people efficiently from point A to point B. The public right of way also bears the burden of creating safe and inclusive (albeit transitory) places for people to interact. Talking about Rochester, New York's recent I-81 highway removal project, Lanessa Owens-Chaplain from the New York Civil Liberties Union has called for planners to learn from I-81 and 'think outside the scope of just laying slabs of concrete down and really start thinking about restoring the community'.⁴⁹

Alternative cartographic representations

If a map of the *Green Book* is going to help urban and transportation planners design safer and more inclusive transportation networks, what should that map look like? The last 25 years have brought a renaissance of scholarly attention to the efforts by visual artists, writers and musicians to maintain alternative geographic records that transcend the limits of GIS and traditional cartography. 'Geographers submit to a tacit agreement to obey certain mapping conventions, to speak in a malleable but standardized visual language,' writes Katharine Harmon in her 2009 book *The Map as Art*. 'Artists are free to disobey these rules. They can mock preoccupation with ownership, spheres of influence, and conventional cultural orientations and beliefs.'⁵⁰ This freedom not only applies to the work of visual artists. Distinguished scholar and urban planner Clyde Woods describes the Blues, which emerged from freed African American folk artists in the South amid the racial violence of post-Civil War Reconstruction and later Jim Crow, as an atlas documenting the socio-spatial context of every locale that its musicians traversed.⁵¹ Similar to these artistic and musical methods of spatial storytelling, the *Green Book* itself is described by artist and urbanist Romi Morrison as 'a methodological rupture that describes both blackness and space not as fixed categories but as socially and historically produced and shifting'.⁵²

These diverse painterly, musical, literary and oral history artefacts constitute 'pictures of experience',⁵³ in the words of the novelist and author of *Another America: Native American Maps and the History of Our Land*, Mark Warhus. While the scientific representations of primarily quantitative geographic data struggle to portray affect and emotion, 'pictures of experience' can collage otherwise absent layers of the human experience back onto the maps discussed in the previous section. Walis Johnson, the New York-based artist and creator of 'The Redline Archive' describes her walking practice as an effort to answer these questions: 'what evidence of past redlining is still visible today? What emotions and insights might arise as I walked along the periphery of Brooklyn's redline, originally mapped in 1938?'⁵⁴ Mishuana Goeman, Professor of Indigenous Studies, clarifies in the introduction to her book *Mark My Words: Native women mapping our nations* that these emotive and artistic representations of spatial memory and knowledge need not sit 'apart from the dominant constructions of space and time, but instead they are explorations of geographies that sit alongside them and engage with them at every scale'.⁵⁵

Critical geographers like Sarah Elwood and Minelle Mahtani have highlighted the urgent need for scholarly acceptance of geographic storytelling methods that afford greater agency and

multidimensionality to the Black subjects they depict, rather than reducing ethnographic knowledge to geolocated data points. Mahtani critiques traditional geospatial analyses of Black communities as methods of knowledge production that 'map the locations of Black subjects in particular arenas, but also actively work to put Black subjects in their place'.⁵⁶ In her assessment, these traditional methods 'drastically diminish the lives of Black people into clearly delineated "facts" as opposed to unveiling complex stories that demonstrate how they have contributed to the production of space'.⁵⁷ Equally embedded in GIS is a Cartesian way of mapping colonial and postcolonial lands preoccupied with coding fixed ownership and permanence. But, as the *Green Book's* legacy of demolished architectural landmarks shows us, Black people, buildings and businesses are rarely afforded the privilege of permanence in American geography. In the words of Katherine McKittrick, 'A world where black is always owned and un-owning – necessarily informs a black sense of place. A kind of geographic beauty emerges'.⁵⁸ To capture this geographic beauty, a kind of counter-mapping with 'the potential for challenging the omissions'⁵⁹ of institutional maps, to borrow from the subject matter expert Nancy Lee Peluso, becomes necessary. Integrating such alternative styles of mapping into scholarly discourse requires us to 'suspend western preconceptions of what makes a map'⁶⁰ and let go of an expectation that 'the primary document is the physical map and the conventions of scale, longitude, latitude, direction, and relative location are believed to "scientifically" depict a landscape'.⁶¹ I am not proposing here to get rid of Cartesian logic or supplant historic preservationists' and urban planners' traditional sources of geographical knowledge, but I will advocate in the following section for setting these alternative maps alongside their institutional counterparts.

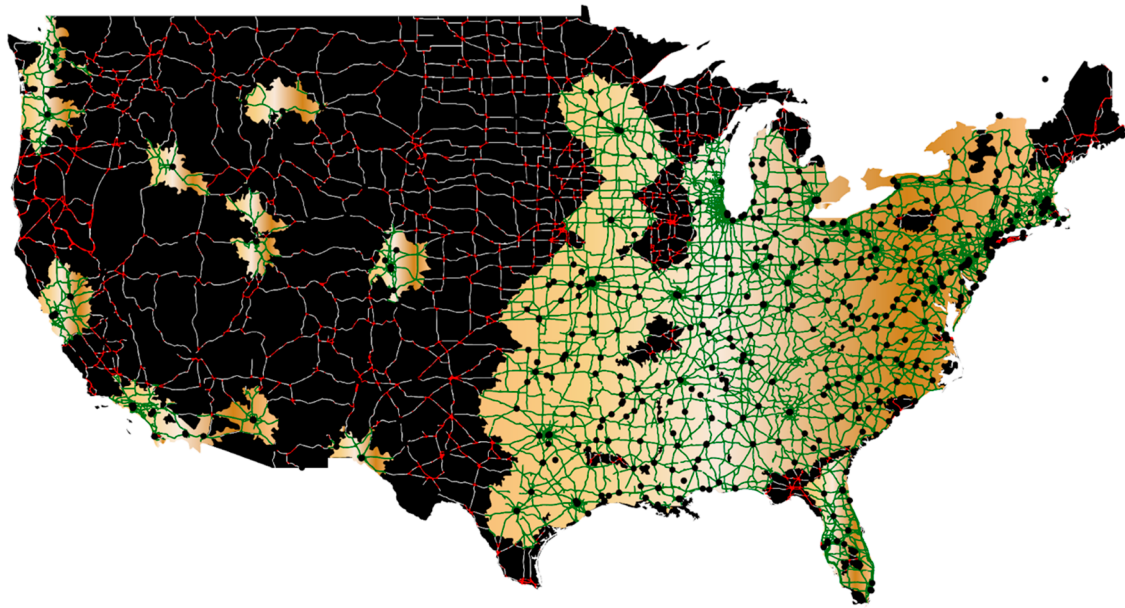
Artistic methodology

Here, I write about my personal experience as an artist working with the *Green Book's* 1956 geospatial data. I initially set out to collage over ESSO road maps from the year, showing how much of the map was virtually unusable for Black travellers at the time. The 1949 *Green Book* prominently featured an endorsement from ESSO representative Wendell P. Alston, in which he encouraged travellers to: 'Keep [a copy of the *Green Book*] on hand each year and when you are planning your trips, let ESSO Touring Service supply you with maps and complete routings'.⁶² These road maps, of course, did not denote how many of the roadways depicted therein represented dead ends for Black travellers, potentially leaving them stranded if lulled into thinking that all the roads on ESSO's map were truly open.

When I began working with my research assistant, Graham Moitoso (an undergraduate architecture student at Northeastern University), on the map pictured in Figure 8, I did not feel thwarted by the gradual realisation that our geospatial analysis of the 1956 *Green Book* locations would be largely inconclusive. Graham and I used the University of South Carolina's database of 1956 *Green Book* locations and decided on 120 minutes as a suitable amount of time to drive between rest stops. Next, we used Esri Online to generate two-hour drivesheds around the points associated with hotels listed in the *Green Book*. Since we could not access a set of 1956 highway shapefiles, we had to rely on today's road network to generate these drivesheds, meaning that we could not create an accurate representation of the safe streets versus dead ends argument. The gaps in the data have, however, liberated me to pursue the cartographic aspects of this project as an artist rather than a quantitative researcher.

The map, as an artistic representation, is free to become the rhetorical device that I was looking for. An abstract map that, in the words of Michael Ra-shon Hall, 'foreground[s] alterity (difference) to designate cities and sights/sites as 'black'- (or African American-) friendly'⁶³ is perhaps a more helpful accompaniment for 'Dark Travel' studies, as Hall coins it. The map that I set out to create was always already destined to fail at contextualising the thousands of experiences that Black travellers encountered along United States roadways or the safety rituals that they employed even on moderately 'safe' routes.⁶⁴ Instead, a simple visualisation of this alterity, coding roads that had the potential to provide a safe and comfortable travel experience as golden and darkening the rest, serves to pique interest and prompt further investigation.

Figure 8. 'Dark Travel Map: 1956', Illustration of 120-minute drivesheds around *Green Book* hotels by Cara Michell and Graham Moitoso.

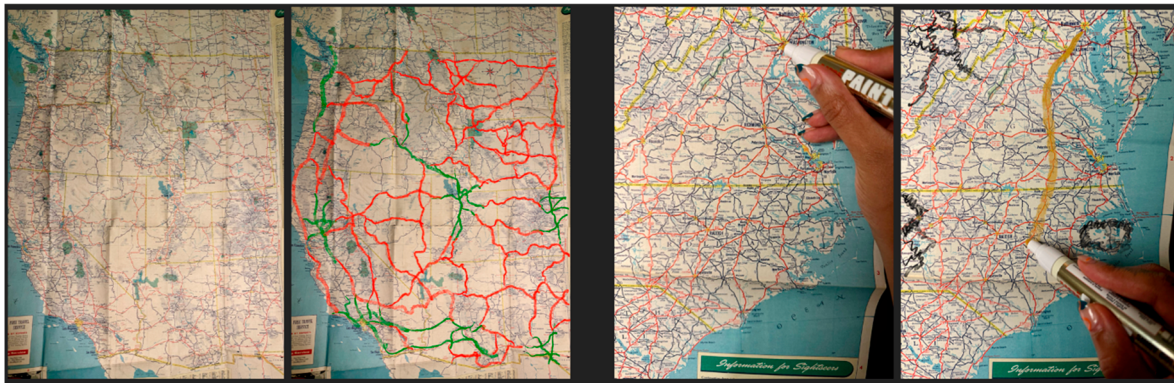


The golden highways in Figure 8 point to the notorious myth that America's roads were paved with gold. Even when travelling along routes with well-distributed *Green Book* addresses, Black travellers could encounter danger in the spaces in between. Candacy Taylor laments near the end of *Overground Railroad* that, 'unfortunately, "driving while black" is still a risky endeavor, and even though the *Green Book* could provide information about safe accommodations, black travelers would still have to drive through dangerous locations to get to these places of sanctuary. A revived *Green Book* wouldn't ensure their safety on the highway.'⁶⁵

However, despite the potential danger they connote, the darkened areas in Figure 8 were not devoid of Black joy, entrepreneurship or spaces of refuge. Victor H. Green was transparent about the limitations of the database contained within his annual publication, writing in the 1948 issue that '[t]he listings contained in this guide are given to you just as it is given to us'.⁶⁶ This explains, in part, why Candacy Taylor's site research revealed that, of the 70,000 small businesses owned by African Americans in the 1930s, 9,500 were listed in the *Green Book* throughout its three decades of publication.⁶⁷ It also gives the map another meaning, only showing hotspots where travellers could access 'highly dignified' spaces of refuge, according to Green and his readers.

As I have moved on to experimenting with analogue versions of making and remaking this map, the experience of hand-drawing travel routes over the top of original 1956 ESSO road maps has opened the door to new insights. As I trace over the highways depicted on the map (Figure 9), cross-checking the safety and usefulness of a turn with my GIS representation of the *Green Book* locations, I feel that I can put myself in the place of my mother (and other forebears) giving directions from the passenger's seat with an oversized map sprawled out on the dashboard. Each movement of the pen (or copper wire in some iterations of my experiment) brings to life the stories that I have read about, and the family histories passed down to me through oral tradition. The attempt to recreate a mapped artefact becomes an immersive performance, one that I recommend anyone interested in mapping their family's travel history should repeat.

Figure 9. '1956 ESSO Road Map Experiments' by Cara Michell, tracing safe and unsafe highways over original United States road maps distributed by ESSO



Conclusion

While segregation and racialised harassment transformed America's geography into a minefield of spatial injustices for visible minorities in twentieth-century USA, the *Green Book* illuminates a parallel geography of safe spaces for African Americans. As I envisioned this project in 2023, it was meant to use precise geospatial analysis to reach conclusions about uneven transportation investment. I thought that a definitive map of the *Green Book*'s geography would encourage further research in three areas that I believed were ripe for intervention: (1) understanding enhancement through immersive mapping; (2) links to research on transportation, policy and investment; and (3) urban and streetscape design interventions. While I still believe that my ambition to expand these areas to include the *Green Book* is valid, I found just as much value in embracing the abstract, inconclusive and interpretative nature of the artistic process. Retracing the routes depicted on the map generated by Graham and I by hand has become a meditative (and emotionally heavy) ritual and one that I intend to continue until the next step of this process presents itself.

In the meantime, this creative research process involving the *Green Book* has prompted me to consider the future of the USA's streetscapes as equitable third places. As suggested by projects like Ghana ThinkTank's 2015 'Art in Odd Places' contribution – a series of signs asking people to stop and think before inadvertently committing acts of racism (Figure 10)⁶⁸ – we are all active participants in either reproducing or deconstructing racially discriminatory transportation networks. Urban and transportation planners, in particular, have a duty to consider the emotional and historical experiences of all people who move through the United States' transportation networks, whether by car or by public and active transit. It is not enough to review the traditionally accepted canon of existing conditions, maps, transportation documents and feedback from community meetings. We must acknowledge that history lives on in our streets and sidewalks, and their design should reflect a commitment to undoing the harm caused by unequal treatment in transportation investments and the availability of roadside amenities. In his essay, Robert Gioielli argues that such visualisations as the HOLC residential security maps can be too powerful a rhetorical tool when analysing the past, resulting in the simplification of a complex timeline of public and private decisions that compounded racial inequity in America.⁶⁹ But he is not asking us to forget these maps; rather, his essay implies that we should complicate them with more diverse methodologies. To understand what it takes to reverse the impacts of racism on our built environment, it is necessary to immerse ourselves in the histories of the people who dealt with and overcame those inequalities firsthand. My call to action now is twofold: I invite other urbanists and transportation experts to join me in tracing over the maps we typically use to understand our transportation systems with the fears, limitations and tactics of survival used by marginalised or otherwise vulnerable travellers in order to fill in our blind spots. And I call on artists to expand the visual and cartographic references that tell these stories. This may not be accomplished with one, two or even three maps. Rather, a collection of Black

geographies representing diverse accounts and spatialising the experience of driving on these roads is necessary.

Figure 10. Sign for 'Art in Odd Places' by Ghana ThinkTank and SUNY Purchase students, New York City, 2015. Source: Christopher Robbins and PBS



Notes

- 1 Gioielli, 'The tyranny of the map'.
- 2 Mitchell and Franco, 'HOLC "redlining" maps'.
- 3 Best and Mejía, 'The lasting legacy of redlining'.
- 4 Coates, 'The case for reparations'.
- 5 Cain, "'Green Book" documentary director says guide was "ingenious"'.
- 6 Achen, 'Lawrence Phillips'.
- 7 Archer, 'White men's roads', 1261–2.
- 8 Richen, "'Guide to freedom'".
- 9 Taylor, *Overground Railroad*, 133.
- 10 Hall, 'The Negro traveller's guide'.
- 11 Taylor, *Overground Railroad*, 17.
- 12 Elwood, 'Toward a fourth generation critical GIS'.
- 13 Hall, 'The Negro traveller's guide', 314; Wendell, 'The Green Book helps solve your travel problems'; Taylor, *Overground Railroad*.
- 14 Lockhart, 'The real story of the Green Book'.
- 15 Richen, "'Guide to freedom'".
- 16 Taylor, *Overground Railroad*, 17.
- 17 Taylor, *Overground Railroad*, 18.
- 18 City of Birmingham, Alabama, 'A.G. Gaston Motel'; The Historic Hampton House, 'ABOUT'; African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, 'A.G. Gaston Motel'.
- 19 Collins, 'The truth about Green Book'.
- 20 Lockhart, 'The real story of the Green Book'.
- 21 Richen, "'Guide to freedom'".
- 22 Richen, "'Guide to freedom'".
- 23 Cross and Rhodes, 'The importance of "The Green Book: Guide to Freedom"'.
- 24 Richen, "'Guide to freedom'".
- 25 Missouri NAACP State Conference Office, 'NAACP travel advisory for the State of Missouri'.

- 26 Missouri NAACP State Conference Office, 'NAACP travel advisory for the State of Missouri'.
- 27 United Black Council, 'The Greenbook'.
- 28 Achen, 'Lawrence Phillips'.
- 29 Achen, 'Lawrence Phillips'.
- 30 National Trails Office Regions 6, 7, 8, 'Route 66'.
- 31 National Trails Office Regions 6, 7, 8, 'Route 66'.
- 32 Anne Bruder, quoted by Bromley, 'Three UVA alums'.
- 33 Bromley, 'Three UVA alums'.
- 34 University of South Carolina, 'Negro Travelers' Green Book'; Beaudoin et al., 'Navigating the Green Book'.
- 35 Michigan State University, 'New exhibit in MSU libraries'; MSU Libraries, 'Detroit businesses'.
- 36 WeGOJA Foundation, 'Print edition of the Green Book'.
- 37 The Bronx High School of Science, 'Skye Lam '22'; Lam, 'Mapping the Green Book in New York City'.
- 38 Twinkl, 'Eighth grade "Green Book" mapping worksheet'; Students of History, 'Green Book mapping project'.
- 39 Gioielli, 'The tyranny of the map'.
- 40 Fernandez, 'Racism by design'.
- 41 Archer, 'White men's roads through Black men's homes'.
- 42 Fernandez, 'Racism by design'.
- 43 Harrington, 'Op-ed'.
- 44 Harrington, 'Op-ed'.
- 45 Spieler, 'Racism has shaped public transit'.
- 46 Tam, 'An antiracist future for our highways'.
- 47 Love and Vey, 'To build safe streets'.
- 48 Robinson, '4 steps to creating inclusive, anti-racist third spaces'.
- 49 Fernandez, 'Racism by design'.
- 50 Harmon, 'Joyce Kozloff', 10.
- 51 Woods, '"Sittin' on top of the world"', 68.
- 52 Morrison, 'Research notes from a Black urbanist'.
- 53 Warhus, *Another America*, 3.
- 54 Johnson, 'Walking the geography of racism'.
- 55 Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 15.
- 56 Mahtani, 'Toxic geographies', 361.
- 57 Mahtani, 'Toxic geographies', 361.
- 58 Hudson and McKittrick, 'The geographies of Blackness and anti-Blackness', 234.
- 59 Peluso, 'Whose woods are these?', 387.
- 60 Warhus, *Another America*, 3.
- 61 Warhus, *Another America*, 3.
- 62 Wendell, 'The Green Book helps solve your travel problems', 4.
- 63 Hall, 'The Negro traveller's guide', 307.
- 64 Taylor, *Overground Railroad*, 28.
- 65 Taylor, *Overground Railroad*, 257.
- 66 Green, 'The Negro Motorist Green Book', 3.
- 67 Taylor, *Overground Railroad*, 14.
- 68 Segal, 'When street signs tell you to walk'.
- 69 Gioielli, 'The tyranny of the map'.

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