WHEN THE FIRST GREEN BOOK WAS PUBLISHED in 1936, the American road was a metaphor for freedom. Freedom to change your present situation, freedom to determine your destiny, freedom to travel. Yet, in 20th century America, this same road was a dangerous place for Black citizens. The land was divided by segregation—through policy or through custom. If you were Black, the prejudice was severe: a systematic effort to deny access to your basic human rights. Imagine the indignity of government-backed and socially normalized oppression. Imagine the pain, the violence, the disrespect. Still, African Americans created destinations and strategies that affirmed their humanity, their worth, their light, and took to the roads. It was done with ingenuity, with community, and with the help of a Harlem postman named Victor Green.

“...the traveling was and wasn’t fun...We couldn’t eat in the restaurants in the South and so we had to go in the market to get what you called ‘souse’ [hogshead cheese] and white saltine crackers. But listen, darling, I loved souse...That was fun. We’d laugh right on down the highway and still have a good time.”

—ARETHA FRANKLIN, vocalist, composer/arranger, and civil rights activist

“The Green Book” travel guide was created by Victor Green to provide African American travelers with critical information on restaurants, gas stations, accommodations, and other businesses that welcomed Black travelers during the era of Jim Crow and “sundown towns.” Published through 1967, the national guide’s rich history is highlighted in the multimedia exhibition, The Negro Motorist Green Book. Visitors will get an immersive look at the reality of travel for African Americans in mid-century America, and understand how The Green Book served as an indispensable resource for the nation’s rising African American middle class. Artifacts such as business signs and postcards alongside historic footage, images, and firsthand accounts convey not only the apprehension felt by African American travelers, but also the resilience, innovation and elegance of people choosing to live a full American existence. The exhibition also brings into focus the vibrant parallel world of African American businesses, the rise of the black leisure class in the United States, and the important role “The Green Book” played in facilitating the second wave of the Great Migration.


The Negro Motorist Green Book was created by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service in collaboration with Candacy Taylor and made possible through the generous support of Exxon Mobil Corporation.


EXHIBITIONS

For exhibition descriptions, check the Washington State Historical Society’s website at www.WashingtonHistory.org/exhibits

JANUARY (FREE online programs for the month of January, see www.WashingtonHistory.org/events for details and links.)

Monday, January 17, 10 AM-5 PM
Celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
Celebrate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with an online performance of Living Voices’ “The Right To Dream.” Download an art activity inspired by Dr. King’s visit to Washington 60 years ago, and follow along with artist Valencia Carroll via video to create your work. See a virtual exhibition and more.

Thursday, January 21, 6 PM
Scholarly Selections: Gender Transgressors in the Library—Building Community and Personal Independence Across the American West
Participate online via Facebook Live as UW Tacoma professor Annie Downey, PhD, LMS, presents research focused on gender-nonconforming librarians, especially in the American West from the late 19th century to present day.

Saturday, January 29, 7-8:30 PM
Opening Reception: All the Sacrifices You’ve Made/ Todos los Sacrificios Que has Hecho, a project by Borderland Collective
All the Sacrifices You’ve Made/ Todos los Sacrificios Que has Hecho, a project by Borderland Collective. Join us for this online conversation on Facebook Live. Hear from Borderland Collective’s Jason Reed and Mark Menjivar, along with Luz M. Iginuez, former director of the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) at the University of Washington.

FEBRUARY

Thursday, February 17, 5-8 PM
National Day of Remembrance
FREE admission and activities
National Day of Remembrance (observed annually on Feb. 19) recognizes President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s signing of Executive Order 9066 and the subsequent incarceration of nearly 120,000 people of Japanese descent living mostly in Washington, Oregon, and California. Join us for the official opening reception of the REMEMBRANCE gallery with a reception and two programs:

Hear from University of Washington Tacoma’s Lisa M. Hoffman, professor of urban studies.

7 PM: Screening of the documentary film Fujitomo Kubota and His Garden with Q&A
This film examines the enduring dreams and legacy of immigrant and nurseryman Fujitomo Kubota, a self-taught gardener who built a thriving landscape business and, through many years of work and challenges, toiled and shaped the landscape in South Seattle into a landmark Japanese garden. While incarcerated at Minidoka (Idaho) concentration camp during World War II, Kubota also created a memorable garden in the desert where he was held. Film followed by Q&A with contributors to the companion book, Spirtual Stone.

MARCH

Friday, March 19, 5:30-9:30 PM
Meet acclaimed documentary Yoruba Richen and see The Green Book: Guide to Freedom. The film features historians, business owners, and individuals who experienced “traveling while Black” in pre-civil rights America, and offers a deeper look into Victor H. Green’s travel guide, The Negro Motorist Green Book. Published from 1936-1967, the guide allowed African Americans to safely travel during a time of severe racism. Film screening and conversation with Richen followed by reception and opportunity to view the exhibition The Negro Motorist Green Book from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. RSVP required, see details at WashingtonHistory.org/events. This program is generously underwritten by the Henry R. Fenbert Challenging History Fund and sponsored by KNKX Public Radio.

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The Washington State Historical Society does not discriminate on the basis of disability in its program delivery and will provide, to the best of its ability, alternate formats upon request. For assistance, contact the ADA Coordinator at 253-272-3500, Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 AM–5:00 PM, and indicate the nature of your accessibility need and preferred format.