



# OVERGROUND RAILROAD

The *Green Book* and the Roots of Black Travel in America

By **CANDACY TAYLOR**

## ABOUT THE BOOK

**A young reader's edition of Candacy Taylor's acclaimed book about the history of the *Green Book*, the guide for Black travelers**

*Overground Railroad* chronicles the history of the *Green Book*, which was published from 1936 to 1966 and was the “Black travel guide to America.” For years, it was dangerous for Black Americans to travel in the United States. Because of segregation, Black travelers couldn't eat, sleep, or even get gas at most white-owned businesses.

The *Green Book* listed hotels, restaurants, department stores, gas stations, recreational destinations, and other businesses that were safe for Black travelers. It was a resourceful and innovative solution to a horrific problem. It took courage to be listed in the *Green Book*, and the stories from those who took a stand against racial segregation are recorded and celebrated.

This young reader's edition of Candacy Taylor's critically acclaimed adult book *Overground Railroad* includes her own photographs of *Green Book* sites, as well as archival photographs and interviews with people who owned and used these facilities. The book also includes an author's note, endnotes, bibliography, timeline, and index.

## PRE-READING IDEAS

The struggles faced by Black Americans in this country have been constant from its inception. *The Overground Railroad* examines a small facet of how society treated Black Americans from the Jim Crow era through the passing of the civil rights movement. The author compares events that happened in the past to the current social climate in the United States. Have students research and discuss events in the towns mentioned and how the town's attitudes towards racism changed or remain the same. Students must understand that the ability to fight a system of continued oppression is not easy but necessary. Have students conduct oral interviews with members of their communities or beyond with those who lived during the turbulent times of the *Green Book* to gain first-hand accounts of what life was like during those days.

*The Overground Railroad* highlights the influences of Black culture on American society. Ask students to choose a time period and create a timeline of significant art, music, dance, fashion, and food. Then have students present their findings using a TED Talk or podcast format so their peers can learn about the joys from each period.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Introduction: Are We There Yet?

- Look at the images on page xii. How do the images reflect American society at the time? What do you notice is the same? What is different? What do we gain from preserving such images?
- Victor Hugo Green was optimistic despite all he experienced as a Black man in United States. He wanted to make the American Dream accessible to all Black people by means of automobile transportation. Using the quote below, answer the following questions:

*“[The American] dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.”*

—James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America*

- o How did the automobile provide a certain amount of freedom for Black people?
- o How did being an owner of an automobile reflect status in American society at that time?
- o What means and methods did Black folks use to achieve the American Dream?
- The author states seventy-five percent of the sites used in the *Green Book* no longer exist but “it was so important . . . to document the ones that are left” (p. xvi). How can these sites and preserving their history help us understand the past?

### Chapter 1: The Business of the Green Book

- Legend has it that Victor Green got the idea to produce a Black travel guide from watching his Jewish friend use a similar guide for Jewish people to vacation in the “Borscht Belt.” Research the Borscht Belt. How did attitudes and policies towards both groups encourage the creation of these travel guides?
- What were some of the methods Green used to promote his book?

- “Although he didn’t get rich off the *Green Book*, his reward was much more valuable than money, because for every business he listed, he may have saved a life” (p. 7). What do you believe is meant by this statement? Do you believe Green should be considered a great national hero? Explain.

### Chapter 2: Driving While Black

- How is the title of the chapter relevant today? What similarities can you draw from what was experienced by Black motorists in the era of the *Green Book* and Black motorists of today?
- Examine the image of the “dapper man in Harlem, circa 1937” on page 9. What do you see? What do you think? What do you wonder?
- How did the Great Migration change the culture of the United States? How did it shape neighborhoods like Harlem in New York?
- The 1930s were a time of horrific race riots that inspired the “Do Not Buy Where You Cannot Work” campaign. Was the movement effective? How can boycotts be used as a compelling method of protest? Can they be damaging? Explain.
- W. E. B. Du Bois intervened in the boycotts of the 1930s. He said, “If we once make a religion of our determination to spend our meager income so far as possible only in such ways as will bring us employment consideration and opportunity, the possibilities before us are enormous” (p. 15). What is the message Du Bois is giving to the Black community? How does this message resonate into today’s social justice movements?
- In what ways did the automobile and the automotive industry offer social mobility for Black Americans in the 1930s?
- What planning or preparations did Black families need to make before taking a road trip?

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is a sundown town? Use this resource from Zinn Education Project to investigate the number of sundown towns that existed in the United States during the twentieth century: [zinnedproject.org/materials/sundown-towns/](http://zinnedproject.org/materials/sundown-towns/). Examine the effects these towns had on the Black community in these areas. What impact do those towns have today?
- What connection do the game of golf and the *Green Book* have in common?
- **ACTIVITY:** There were many who assisted Black folks in cities where they were not afforded opportunities. Would you consider them allies or opportunists? Conduct research on Frank Schiffman, Leo Brecher, and Nicholas Dreystadt. Create a mock interview with them that reflects the influence they played for Black artists and the community during the 1930s.
- Illinois had a high rate of sundown towns. Consider Curtis Coleman’s quote on page 60: “Well, in the South you knew the law, they told you the truth. Chicago, they won’t tell you the truth. That’s the only difference” (p. 60). How does this quote exemplify the fear and potential harm Black folks faced in these towns?
- **ACTIVITY:** Lynching was a horrific practice that killed many innocent Black people during the Jim Crow era. Use the Equal Justice Initiative’s Lynching in America lesson plan alongside the questions and exercises offered in this guide: [eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america](http://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america). As a class, discuss all the ways we can honor the legacy and lives of those who were lynched.
- **ACTIVITY:** The Great Migration led to the creation of prominent Black cities in the North and West. Create a map outlining the three well-traveled routes that folks took to the North and West. Then research a major city where Black folks from the South settled. Present your findings about the opportunities and the struggles they faced in their new cities.

### Chapter 3: The Fight

- How did *Green Book* become a “political weapon” during the 1940s?
- Who is Irene Morgan and what is her connection to the Freedom Rides?
- **ACTIVITY:** Research the history and significance of the GI Bill and the treatment of Black soldiers upon their return from World War II. Write a news article comparing the opportunities available to Black soldiers versus their white counterparts.

### Chapter 4: A License to Leave

- How did the term “Jim Crow” evolve?
- How did Langston Hughes describe the experiences of Black people when they left the South? How does this challenge any preconceived notions about the North and the West being beacons of freedom?
- In the 1920s, a quarter of all white men in Indiana were Klansmen. What does this statistic say about racial attitudes in the state? In the country? Conduct your own research to find methods used by the Klan that helped shaped policy and laws in cities across the nation.

### Chapter 5: All Aboard

- What was the Black community’s relationship with train transportation?
- What role did porters play in train transportation? How did A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters change the game for Black train employees?
- Why was Denver, Colorado, considered the “Harlem of the West”?
- Do you believe that Victor Hugo Green intentionally did not discuss race issues in the *Green Book*?
- **ACTIVITY:** Many prolific sites are mentioned in this chapter, such as the Rossinian and the Harvey House. Choose one of the sites and create an advertisement to entice travelers to come stay at that establishment. Reflect the language, images, and culture of the time in your ad.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Chapter 6: Vacation

- Examine the image on page 83 of the postcard, which depicts a street scene at Atlantic Beach, South Carolina. What do you think? What do you see? What do you wonder?
- *Ebony* magazine described Black jetsetters as “dignified American Negroes.” How was plane travel different from train or automobile traveling? What freedoms did it afford to those who could travel abroad?
- Primary source documents help us understand the past through many voices. Analyze the letter on page 89 from Michigan Representative Charles C. Diggs. How does it help us understand the social climate of that era? To what extent was segregation implemented in airports? How was it unsafe for Black travelers?
- How did the Henderson Travel Agency transform Black travel?
- In 2016, only seven percent of National Parks visitors were Black. Why would Black travelers avoid visiting National Parks? What does this say about generational trauma?
- **ACTIVITY:** Write a travel trip review for one of the vacation spots mentioned in this chapter. What would you include? What advice would you give to travelers? Who would they see? What would they do?

### Chapter 7: Music Venues

- What was the Chitlin’ Circuit? Why do you think they uses the word “chitlin”?
- If you wanted to visit one of the famous clubs mentioned in the *Green Book*, which one would it be and why? Who would you take with you? What would you look forward to doing at that club?
- Discuss the influence that Black clubs had on American music and dance culture. Name some of the popular dances inspired by Black clubs.
- What was a “personality deejay”?

- What was “beach music”? How was it different from music of its time?
- How does the story of Charlie’s Place reflect the racial climate of the times, even if one was a successful Black businessperson?
- **ACTIVITY:** Pretend you are a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*. Write a report that covers Jack’s Basket Room. How would you describe the place? What important information would you include?
- **ACTIVITY:** Create a website that pays homage to the San Francisco Fillmore District. Be sure to include the unique features of this area and why this was an important piece of Black history.

### Chapter 8: The Roots of Route 66

- How did Black motorists know about sundown towns if they weren’t in the *Green Book*?
- Booker T. Washington called Tulsa’s Greenwood District “Black Wall Street.” Share this *New York Times* article with students to learn more about its tragic destruction: [nytimes.com/interactive/2021/05/24/us/tulsa-race-massacre.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/05/24/us/tulsa-race-massacre.html). Ask if they heard about Greenwood previously, and if so, how. Are there other examples of Black communities being destroyed? What could the city of Tulsa do today to rectify what happened to their Black residents?
- Many are familiar with images of Black youth protesting segregated lunch counters in the 1950s and 1960s. What role did Clara Luper have on the movement? Why do you think her story is not taught in classrooms or featured in history books?
- **ACTIVITY:** Research how Route 66 influenced the infrastructure of your city or town. What changes were made to accommodate the route? Did it bring positive or negative experiences for the residents? Share your findings with the class.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **ACTIVITY:** Use the 3-2-1 method when teaching about the sundown towns in Illinois and Missouri: [facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/3-2-1](http://facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/3-2-1)
  - Record 3 interesting facts
  - Record 2 ways the information is significant
  - Write a 1-sentence summary about your learning
- **ACTIVITY:** Ferguson, Missouri, has a long history of civil unrest and injustices. Conduct a research study showing the history of Ferguson’s racist practices as well as methods used by the community to overcome these practices.
- **ACTIVITY:** Draw up a route that Black motorists might take on Route 66, highlighting rest areas, hotels, and entertainment found along the way, and point out cities and places that should be avoided. Make sure to include start and end destinations and a list of what to take on the trip.

### Chapter 9: Women and the *Green Book*

- Examine the image on page 148 of the two women standing in front of a car. What do you think? What do you see? What do you wonder?
- Describe a “tourist home.” Do we have anything like them today?
- Consider the impact that Black women had on the *Green Book*. How did it help promote Black women and expand their opportunities?
- What risks did single Black women face while traveling?
- **ACTIVITY:** Create a TikTok or video that explains the significance of the following Black women and organizations:
  - Madam C.J. Walker’s College of Beauty and Culture
  - Annie M. Turnbo Malone’s Poro College
  - Young Women’s Christian Association
  - Velvutex College of Beauty and Culture

- **ACTIVITY:** Choose one of the influential women from the chapter and create a LinkedIn page that reflects their accomplishments.

### Chapter 10: A Change Is Gonna Come

- Listen to the song “A Change Is Gonna Come” by Otis Redding. How did that reflect the social strife of the 1960s? Does that song still resonate today? Explain.
- The image on page 168 of the Afro pick can have many meanings. What are some of these meanings? How did this pick reflect the ideologies of Black Americans during the 1960s? What did it represent?
- Define “colorism.” How does this term racialize our society? What impact does colorism have on the Black community?
- How did Chrysler provide opportunities for Black car owners? Why do you think some companies provided such opportunities while others did not?
- Describe the many new features in the *Green Book* that reflected the changing political and social scenes in the US. Do you believe that having the *Green Book* become “political” was a wise move? Why or why not?
- What was the significance of Esso gas stations for Black motorists?
- On page 185, the author writes, “A ‘change was gonna come’ by any means necessary.” After reading this chapter, how does this quote reflect what was discussed?
- **ACTIVITY:** Analyze the image on page 175 of police dogs attacking demonstrators in 1963. You are a reporter witnessing that horrific event unfolds. Write a headline that captures the most important aspect of this topic.
- **ACTIVITY:** Create a visual timeline showing the events, changes, and governmental policies that impacted the Civil Rights Movement between 1960 and 1965.



## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Chapter 11: Integration and the Double-Edged Sword of Progress

- Based on the title of the chapter, what you think will be covered in this section?
- Between 1866 and 1965, many civil rights laws were passed. Why do you think this is? Jelani Cobb said, “History doesn’t repeat itself. Humans do” (p. 221). How can this quote be used to explain the series of laws passed during this hundred-year span?
- How did the Civil Rights Act of 1964 change our society? How did it empower Black people? Did it provide more security and opportunity for the Black community? How did it impact the listings in the *Green Book*?
- What was one factor that challenged or forced white business owners to desegregate?
- Should the *Green Book* have remained a resource for only Black businesses? Should it have included white-owned businesses? Explain.
- What made the Dew Drop Inn so unique?
- How is it that integration and desegregation can be considered both a blessing and a curse?
- **ACTIVITY:** Below are two sentences from this chapter, reflecting on the impact of the *Green Book* and the Civil Rights Movement. Pick one and write a paragraph explaining why you agree with the sentence. Use information from what you learned about the *Green Book* in your answer:
  - “*Green Book* sites were on the front lines in the battle for equality” (p. 202)
  - “We got what we wanted, but we lost what we had.”  
–Georgina Ayers (p. 205)

### Epilogue

- **ACTIVITY:** Author Candacy Taylor uses stories from her own childhood experiences to explain many facets of the United States’s racial history. Many young people today are at the forefront of advocating for changes in their communities. Create a civic action project focused on a topic impacting Black and Brown communities, like mass incarceration, the school-to-prison pipeline, the war on drugs, or police brutality.

Uses these websites for additional guidance on civic actions plans:

- Constitutional Rights Foundation: Civic Action Project  
[crfcap.org](http://crfcap.org)
- C3 Teachers: Civic Action Project  
[c3teachers.org/inquiries/civic-action-project](http://c3teachers.org/inquiries/civic-action-project)

The project should include:

#### *Action research*

- Why does this topic matter to you? To your community?
- What resources will you need to complete information-gathering about the topic?

#### *Implementation*

- What method will you use to disseminate the information so people can learn about the topic?
- What do you hope to accomplish?
- How will you know you accomplished it?

## STANDARDS AND SKILLS

*The Overground Railroad* covers all four dimensions of the National Council for the Social Studies's C3 framework: developing questions and planning inquires; applying disciplinary concepts and tools; evaluating sources and using evidence; and communicating conclusions and taking informed action. Read more about the framework at [socialstudies.org/standards/c3](https://socialstudies.org/standards/c3).

Supporting Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in reading informational text for middle and high school curriculums, *The Overground Railroad* is an appropriate selection for grades 8–12 in language arts, social studies, or humanities classes. The following prompts provide for a critical analysis of *The Overground Railroad* using the CCSS for Informational Text.

### **Key Ideas and Details:**

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.2](#)

Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.6](#)

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1](#)

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2](#)

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact with and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3](#)

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

### **Craft and Structure:**

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5](#)

Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

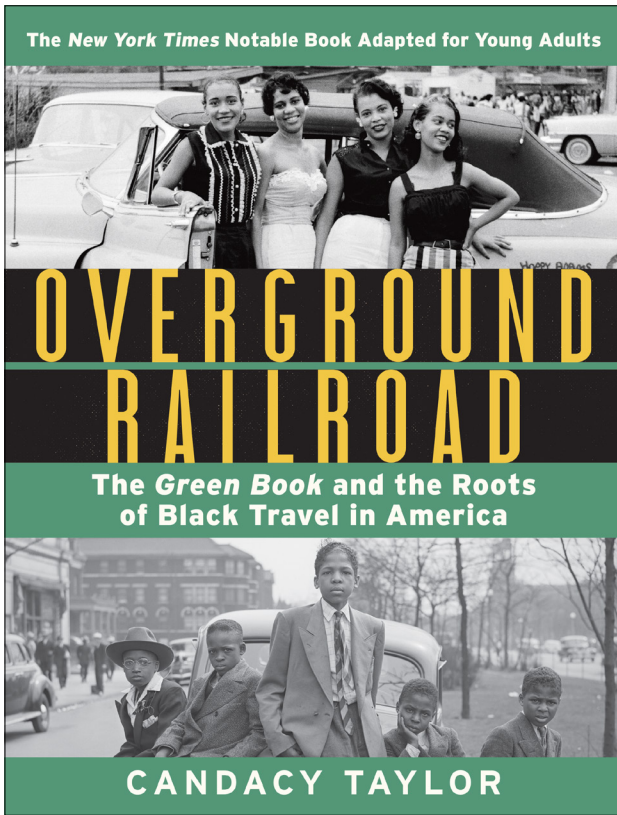
### **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:**

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7](#)

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) to address a question or solve a problem.

# OVERGROUND RAILROAD (THE YOUNG ADULT ADAPTATION)

by Candacy Taylor



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Photo by Katrina Parks - Assertion Films



Candacy Taylor is an award-winning author, photographer, and cultural documentarian. Her work has been featured in more than 50 media outlets, including *The New Yorker* and the

*Atlantic*. She is the recipient of numerous fellowships and grants, including the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University and the National Endowment for the Humanities. She lives in New York.

## PRAISE

★ “Taylor has skillfully adapted her acclaimed 2020 adult title for teens into a smooth, readable volume that provides context for the rise of Black travel guides and the societal changes that Green and his wife, Alma, responded to . . . Meticulous research and lively anecdotes combine to provide a powerful volume of social history.”

—Kirkus Reviews, starred review

★ “Enhancing the impeccable writing is an attractive design with Green Book covers, images of the guide’s sites, and other period photographs . . . An impressive insight into Black history that still resonates today.”

—Booklist, starred review

★ “Exceptionally supported with photographs, maps, newspaper articles, and other artifacts, this is a priceless addition for researchers and readers seeking to understand not just the complexities and insidiousness of centuries of systemic racism in America, but the drive and determination required to fight white supremacy.”

—School Library Journal, starred review

“A potent discussion starter regarding the current state of the ‘open road’ for Black travelers.”

—Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books

This teaching guide was written by Abeer Shinnawi, an eighteen-year veteran middle school social studies teacher. Shinnawi has developed curriculum and professional development for museums like the Reginald F. Lewis Museum in Baltimore, among others. She is also a member of the teacher advisory group for the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. Learn more about her and her work at [altairedconsulting.com](http://altairedconsulting.com).



ABRAMS