

# The History of *The Negro Motorist Green Book*

Decades after the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery, African Americans continued to suffer unequal treatment, especially in the South, where Jim Crow laws discriminated against blacks in nearly every aspect of public life, including travel. Although the roads and highways were free for all to use, doing so was not easy for blacks. Most hotels and restaurants would not serve African Americans, and driving overnight often meant sleeping in cars and packing food to eat during the journey. Many gas stations would not sell gas to black drivers, so they had to carry gas cans and always be on the lookout for the few stations that would welcome their business. Even then, they might not be allowed to use a public restroom.

In 1936, an African American living in New York City named Victor Green wrote a book to help black travelers. He made a list of all the hotels, restaurants, gas stations, and businesses that would serve African Americans in his city. There was such a high demand for his book that he decided his next edition would include other towns in other states, as well.

The Green Book was sold for a quarter in 1940 at black-owned businesses and at Esso stations, which were among the only gas stations that sold to African Americans. Esso was owned by the Standard Oil Company, which eventually provided funding and offices for Victor Green. The Green Book quickly became very popular and helped many businessmen on the road, as well as the families who needed and wanted to travel by car.

By 1949, the price of the Green Book had grown along with its size—it cost 75 cents and was 80 pages. It covered all the United States, Bermuda, Mexico, and Canada!

In the 1950s and early 1960s, civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. brought national and international recognition to the injustices suffered by African Americans. Jim Crow's days were numbered. On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Bill into law. Among other things, this act made it illegal for hotels, restaurants, and gas stations to discriminate against customers.

Victor Green published the final edition of the Green Book that same year—1964. His lifelong dream to see African American travelers treated equally was finally a reality.

To view a copy of a real Green Book online, visit [www.ruthandthegreenbook.com](http://www.ruthandthegreenbook.com).

