

“Navigating Jim Crow: *The Green Book* and Oasis Spaces in North Carolina” Traveling Exhibit

“There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment.”

The North Carolina African American Heritage Commission (AAHC), a division of the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR), has created a new traveling exhibit about sites important to, and personal memories about, American travel during the “Jim Crow” era of legal segregation. *The Negro Motorist Green Book, published between 1936 and 1966, was both a guide and a tool of resistance designed to confront the realities of racial discrimination in the United States and beyond. The book listed over 300 North Carolina businesses – from restaurants and hotels, to guest houses, drug stores, nightclubs, barber shops and beauty salons – in the three decades that it was published. The exhibit highlights a complex statewide network of business owners and Green Book sites that allowed African American communities to thrive, and that created “oasis spaces” for a variety of African American travelers. The exhibit will be on display at the Mary C. Jenkins Community & Cultural Center beginning July 13 through September 5, 2023.*

Eight vibrant panels form the exhibit, showcasing images of business owners, travelers and historic and present-day Images of North Carolina Green Book sites. The words of African American travelers and descendants of Green Book site owners are featured prominently in the exhibit. Each of these stories are from oral histories collected by the AAHC in 2018 and 2019.

In offering advice to its readers, the Green Book adopted a pleasant and encouraging tone. It usually avoided discussing racism in explicit terms—one article simply noted that “the Negro travelers’ inconveniences are many”—but as the years passed it began to champion the achievements of the civil rights movement.

There is no fee to see this exhibit but any donations to support programming at the MCJCCC would certainly be appreciated. Since the Center Director, Tyree Griffin is a City employee, he is not always at the Center building and because scheduled events take place in the Community Room where the exhibit will be installed, visitors are advised to call 828-376-9303 and schedule a viewing time.