

Folklife Today

February 2021: The Green Book

Announcer:

From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Music clip:

Sampson Pittman and Calvin Frazier: Highway 61 Blues

[00:25]

Steve Winick:

Welcome to Folklife Today. I'm Steve Winick, a folklife specialist at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress, creator of the Folklife Today blog, and I'm here with John Fenn, who is the Head of Research and Programs for the Center.

John Fenn:

Hello. This episode of Folklife Today is premiering during African American History Month. The American Folklife Center has hours and hours of material relating to African American History online, from songs by African American veterans of World War I to interviews with Civil Rights leaders in our Civil Rights History Project collection. But this February we decided to focus on one collection with fascinating implications for the contemporary world.

Steve Winick:

That's right. It's an oral history collection related to The Green Book, a travel guide that directed African Americans to businesses that would serve them during the era of Jim Crow and Segregation. We have a special guest with us, Candacy Taylor, who is an award-winning author, photographer and cultural documentarian working on a multidisciplinary project based on the Green Book. Taylor is the author of the book *Overground Railroad: The Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America*. And she's also developing exhibits, multimedia presentations, and many other programs based on The Green Book.

John Fenn:

And we should also say that her work on the Green Book has received grants from Harvard University, National Geographic, The National Park Service, The National Endowment for the Humanities, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The Graham Foundation, California Humanities, and The American Council of Learned Societies. And, we're very proud to say, it was funded by an Archie Green Fellowship from the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

Steve Winick:

Candacy Taylor is so impressive that we're in danger of spending the entire episode just bragging that she's actually here with us. Instead though, let us welcome her to the podcast. Welcome, Candacy Taylor!

[02:10]

Candacy Taylor:

Well, thank you very much. I really appreciate it. That was a lovely introduction. It was embarrassing to me.

John Fenn:

Well, well, we're so happy to have you here. So let's start at the beginning. What is the Green Book?

Candacy Taylor:

The Green Book was a travel guide that was published for black people during the Jim Crow era. It started publication in 1936 and remained in publication till 1967.

John Fenn:

And what can you tell us about Victor Hugo Green?

Candacy Taylor:

Victor Hugo Green was the man who created the Green Book. And it was really an ingenious idea that he had. He was living in Harlem. He was a postal worker from Harlem. He literally was in the process of basically looking through his own neighborhood and seeing how many places black people were shut out of, even in Harlem, because Harlem has this reputation as being the black Mecca of, you know, culture and, and energy. And anything you could do was accessible to black folks. And that simply wasn't true. There was a riot in 1935 that was triggered largely by race in Harlem. And he had a friend who was a Jewish friend of his, who used a kosher guide to travel up North to the borscht belt. And it was just really handy because it would show him where he could get kosher food and where he would feel welcome.

And Victor green thought this would be really useful even just for my neighborhood. And he was driving his wife, Alma Duke Green to Virginia, to Richmond, Virginia, regularly to see her family. And so that's how he got the idea. And again, in 1936 was when it was started and it was just really a Harlem guide. And within a few years, it grew very quickly because there was such a need for it throughout the country. However, it's important to realize that the Green Book wasn't the first or the only black travel guide there were nearly a dozen of them and the first black travel guide was in 1931 called Hackley and Harrison's, but the Green Book had the largest reach, the largest impact. It was the most...it was an international guide. It traveled throughout...you could go

throughout the world. There were 33 countries in Africa listed in the Green Book. So compared to all the other ones, this was the most fabulous one. That's the one we, we tend to celebrate.

[4:45]

Steve Winick:

Right. Wow. So we should say that the disturbing part of the story of course, is the racism that gave rise to the Green Book. So could you explain why the book was so necessary? What were the dangers and challenges that black travelers encountered and that the Green Book could help you with?

Candacy Taylor:

Right. The Green Book was, again, it, you know, because it started in Harlem, it was serving this specific need, but throughout the country and mind you Harlem, you know, we're in the North here, this is not a Southern issue. Jim Crow and the Jim Crow South. Yes, there were problems, but Jim Crow was pervasive throughout the country and maybe they didn't have signs, colored and white. And in some cases, some people would argue that that was actually better in the Jim Crow South to have the signs, because then you knew where you were welcome throughout the country. There were also these things called sundown towns, and they were largely a Northern, Midwestern and Western phenomena. And these were all white towns. They were all white on purpose. For instance, the state of Illinois had hundreds of sundown towns, we think between 400 and 600 sundown towns and Mississippi only had a handful.

So that gives you a snapshot of really what the country was like. And for so many black people who were leaving the South, many of which, who were fleeing racial terror, because the second wave of the great migration was going on when the Green Book was at its height. So you had millions of people leaving the South black folks who were trying to relocate to these Northern cities and in Los Angeles and in the Pacific Northwest. But it was very challenging because they, they learned very quickly that Jim Crow had no borders. You know, when you left the Mason Dixon line, it was still dangerous. Sundown towns literally had signs, many of which that would say "N-word, don't let the sun set on you here." Or they'd ring a bell at 6:00 PM, alerting the locals that there were local domestics and black people who worked in the town, but that bell would ring and that would mean it's time for you to leave. You couldn't sleep overnight in that town. So again, of course, unless you were local, you didn't know what that bell meant.

Look at Route 66, that traveled from Chicago to Los Angeles passed through eight States and 44 out of the 89 counties on Route 66 were sundown towns. So it was very dangerous and there was no black Twitter. There was not even a list of sundown towns. It's not like you'd head out knowing, "Oh, I have to avoid this." You just were driving along. And then there you were in the wrong place at the wrong time. So the gift of the Green Book was that it really did at least show the communities where black culture was

happening, where there were black owned businesses where you knew you could get services. And that was, it was literally a lifesaver.

Steve Winick:

There's a story you sometimes tell that your stepfather told you about his family being pulled over at one point which I think kind of vividly shows what this was like.

[07:55]

Candacy Taylor:

Yes. You know, I started doing this research in 2013 and it took me about, I guess it's now about eight years before the book came out. And even though I know my stepfather, the majority of my life I didn't realize that there was so much about his life growing up in the Jim Crow South that he didn't share with me. Because he talked all the time and he taught all kinds of stories, but I didn't hear these kinds of stories until I started doing this work because I think he started to trust me. And he knew that I, I guess I could understand.

And he was about seven years old and his father worked for the railroad. They had a, you know, he had a good job and they had a new car and with all the modern features and they were driving North. Ron, my step-father was from Tennessee, from Memphis and they were driving North and across the Tennessee border, and the sheriff pulled him over.

And the first thing he said to him, you know, when Ron's father was in the front seat, when the sheriff pulled them over and the sheriff was walking towards the car, he turned around and he said, "don't say a word." And Ron did not...he's seven. He didn't know what was going on. He didn't understand that there could be trouble. And so the sheriff got to the window and said, you know, whose car is this? And where are you going? And who are these people with you? And Ron's father said, you know, this is my employer's car. And he looked at his wife and pretended he didn't know her and said she's a maid and that's her son and I'm driving them home. And Ron just sat in the back seat, just tight lipped. He didn't understand what was going on.

And the Sheriff said, "where's your hat?" And his father said, "oh, it's hanging right in the back, officer." And Ron looked over and there had always been this hat, this black hat hanging back there. He never knew what it was for. He never knew what it was. And it was a chauffeur's hat.

And...and he said after that day, he saw them in nearly every black man's car that he rode in. And it just, you know, and I'm standing there and him, he he's telling me this story in the kitchen and I'm trying not to cry, you know, because, you know, he told me other stories about his cousin being chased out of town by the KU Klux Klan, and almost getting lynched and, and all of these things. And I think it was heartbreaking because I've been reading all of these horrible things and we know the history, but it was

heartbreaking that this man who I'd known since I was, you know, 12 and had been in my family and talks all the time, had never told me these things. And so I started realizing the scars of, you know, of Jim Crow and, and growing up black in, in this country.

[10:36]

John Fenn:

In this context, Candacy, the Green Book was a guide to safety and shelter. And, and now it serves as a guide to, as you articulated kind of where African-American culture happened, where people were able to gather, can you explain to us your process for documenting these Green Book sites now?

Candacy Taylor:

Oh, it's been a process. I mean, really. And that's why it's taken me so many years and I'm still documenting them, even though I had the book out and the exhibition and everything. I mean, when I first started this project Wikipedia, which, you know, I'm not at all saying anyone should ever trust Wikipedia as a source. But they said there were 1500 Green Book sites on Wikipedia. And this was before I got the fellowship at the Schomburg and the Schomburg has a largest collection of Green Books in the country, in the world. And if you Google "NYPL Green Book," you can view them all. And they've digitized them all now, which is amazing. But when I started this project, they weren't digitized. And we didn't know, there were only two additions that we really had access to. So when Wikipedia said there were 1500 sites, I thought, wow, that's, that seemed like a lot at the time. But after getting to the Schomburg and doing that research, you know, I've cataloged over 10,000 Green Book sites now, and I've scouted like physically gone out and scouted about over 5,000 and I'm finishing up, COVID willing this summer, I'm finishing the field research to develop the mobile app.

But what I found very quickly was that the, these Green Book sites were clustered. About 80% of them are in traditional black neighborhoods. So I got to a point where I could scout. I mean, I worked 16 hour days and I was on the road for five, six months at a time. I took several trips. I probably took seven trips doing the field research for this project. But when I was out there, you know, I would see that there'd be these clusters of...I'd scout, about 30 a day, that was my target to really get a snapshot of really what's left. And what I found is about three to 5% of them are still operating and about 80% are just gone. I mean, they're just erased from the landscape. There's no building, there's no evidence that it ever existed. Urban renewal was a real thing. It really did wipe out incredible amounts of our black culture. You know, I'd be looking at my notes and just, Oh, there should be 20 Green Book sites here and they've just been replaced by a freeway. So, yeah. So, and I'm so glad because when I, I got the fellowship at Harvard, to do the scholarly research, I went to the Schomburg and then went to Harvard. And then after that I could have written a book. I mean, I had enough there to do it, and I had already sold the book proposal to Abrams.

So I was just supposed to go back and basically write the book. But once I had done several scouting trips at that point, I realized that what was happening in these communities today was so significant. And so telling about a lot of the racial, racialized policies, government policies that have been enacted over the last 50 years that have really shaped these communities and really told a different story that continue in use beyond the civil rights act of 1964. And the Green Book ceased publication in 1967. So a lot happened after that, that that story really needed to continue and we needed to contextualize it, that historic narrative to today. And so that's when I continued the field research and really wrote a different book.

And I, you know, I told Abrams, I said, you know, I will write the book that I proposed, but I think there's a deeper and bigger story here. So I asked to rewrite the proposal and, and said, you know, if you agree, then this is the book we'll do. And if not I'll write the one that I sold you. And, and after I wrote the proposal, they agreed, but then I only had eight months to write the book. So it was, it was stressful, but I'm so thankful that, you know, we get to...that we get to see this living history because these sites and these people that are still a part of it are really important.

[14:51]

Steve Winick:

Yeah. And we now have, of course, many of your photographs and wonderful interviews online at the Library of Congress website. So that is a blessing to us. At our women documenting the world symposium, you talked a little about the dangers that you yourself encountered on this journey to document Green Book sites as an African-American woman. Could you share a little bit of that story?

Candacy Taylor:

Being a woman and being a black woman? Yes, that, that is interesting because I've been doing this work for over 20 years now, and I've documented everything from older diner waitresses to beauty shop operators, and different types of ethnic communities all over the country. I've documented female bullfighters. And it wasn't until I did this project, that it became very clear to me that, you know, being a black woman researching this black history, I was stunned again, that if I went to a place like South side of Chicago and I've been in Chicago, many, probably a dozen times, one of my favorite cities, but I'd never been to these pockets of Chicago and one particular neighborhood over like 53 people had been shot that weekend. I was there and it was crazy. It was incredibly dangerous and terrifying.

I travel alone. It's the way that I do it. Because again, who's gonna really work 16 hour days, and food is not really important to me. I mean, there's things that being on the road, I'm just kind of driven literally and figuratively to just get it done. So, but there were definitely times in Miami, Baltimore places that, you know, the level of poverty and desperation were so extreme that, you know, I would not get out of my car with my

camera, that's, you know, very expensive, and become a target. I mean, I ended up traveling with a stun gun under my seat a knife and mace, and they were all within arm's distance. I did get chased and harassed and, you know, almost assaulted. But I was okay, you know, in the end. And there were times when I just had to use my instincts and I'd have to leave.

And I had to be really smart about not second guessing myself. And, you know, for instance, when I was in Miami and at the Hampton House, as I'm photographing the Hampton House, there's a young girl who's approaching me, who's coming into my frame. And I saw her, I saw her coming from down the street and it looked odd. I thought, you know, is she okay? And then I realized she didn't have any clothes on from the waist down. She was completely naked from the waist down. And she looked very young. She looked like she could be no older than 19 years old. And she was just twirling her hair. And she was a prostitute and she was, you know, on drugs. And it was just very sad, you know, I, and I obviously didn't film her or, you know, I put my camera down when she came into the frame, but, but there were scenes like that.

And there were moments where, you know, and I was scouting that neighborhood near the Hampton House where I just...cause you have to go round and around the same block sometimes, you know, a lot of times the addresses are hard to see. It becomes very clear, very quickly that you are an outsider, you know? And so it's, you have to casually drive around. But once they see your car a few times, you know, people are sitting outside, they start to look at you, you know, and there's some, and sometimes that's fine. And I've had that happened in Denver. And people came up to me and said, Oh, what are you doing? And I described the project and they were very nice. But then there were times when my instincts were like, ah, this is not the place I'm, you know, it's not good for me to be an outsider here and I'd have to leave. And so I had to cut some of the scouting in certain cities short, where it's like, it's just not, you know, it's not safe, but so yeah, so being a woman, you know, definitely shifted some of the access. You know, I'm not going to go and knock on somebody's door, especially if it was a tourist home. And you know, there, there are different strategies that I may use for the other projects that I couldn't use for this one.

[19:16]

John Fenn:

You get an intense sense of history from your reflections, right? This sort of the, the what's your experiencing doing this is on a continuum, going back to the time when the Green Book was active. So that history is traumatic and, and, you know, in racially charged, there's also history of families in some of these interviews. Right. And one, one that I find really fascinating was your talk with Leah Chase of Dooky Chase's restaurant in New Orleans. The restaurant started in 1941 and is still operating. What was it like documenting the Chase family's life's work in this broader context.

Candacy Taylor:

It was one of the highlights of my life, honestly. I mean, I, I had met Leah a couple of years before my interview that that the Library of Congress has now. And so Stella was the contact there who, who basically coordinated this interview for me. And I brought a dear friend of mine. Sophie Pegram, who's a filmmaker to actually do video footage of, of the...and I brought my camera and took photographs. But for this particular interview, I mean, she's, she was 96 when I interviewed her and she passed just a few months within four months, I believe after our interview. And she was still vibrant and on it, and her brain was just so clear and her stories and her energy around, you know, she just was so excited that there were two women there to interview her. And, you know, this idea, she's like, we really have made some progress and she was just so, and she didn't want that to pass that.

Like, it was unusual because she's been interviewed by everybody, you know, she's a legend in her own, right. There was like a waiting line to receive. I mean, a receiving line for her. That's always people from all over the country have been coming to just wait to talk to her and she's this celebrity chef, but she's, so her story is so tied to the history of the South and in the interview, you'll, you know, you'll read and see that, you know, she, she had to move to new Orleans because she couldn't go to school in the town that she came from. And, you know, it was a small town outside of a rural area of Louisiana. And it was, and I think, you know, my mother had just passed a few months before I met with her too who had dementia. And so there was something and my mother was in her seventies.

And so I think I was really emotional during this interview too, because I was seeing Leah in her nineties being as fabulous as she was. And you know, of course I think I was reminiscing. Like, God, I wish my mother had had another 20 years like this. And just the impact of me being there, doing this for the Library of Congress, it just felt very important. And the fact that I was, I wish I could have been a fly on the wall in the moment. And I was actually there conducting the interview. It was very, it was very special to me. And to know that we know we're going to archive this history and her story. And she just told great stories about, you know, Michael Jackson and, and Barack Obama and how she slapped his hand because he tried to put hot sauce on her gumbo.

She was just, you know, she would treat you the same, whether you were Barack Obama or, you know, just a fan coming to try some of her food, but she did a lot of first. And that restaurant is just, it's one of the treasures of, of our country and, you know, anybody who hasn't been, you know, it's kind of a bucket list thing. Everybody should go and experience it because there's nothing like it. And they're never wellbeing because of the history of, of her and Dooky, her husband who had passed and the legacy that the family is still, you know, they're still active and a part of the community and engaged in this history. So it was, it was a huge honor.

[23:32]

John Fenn:

Let's listen to that clip when she talks about slapping Barack Obama's hand.

Candacy Taylor:

I heard that...did you really slap Barack Obama's hand? [laughing]

Leah Chase:

Obama. Poor dog. He came and he said, "I'm going to have some chicken." [He was] always running, always in a rush. So he sat down. I said "I'm going to serve you gumbo, and you can take your chicken on the plane." So here I come with a bowl of gumbo and here he is with the Tabasco sauce. I said, "You don't put hot stuff in my gumbo!" [laughing]...before I realized...I'm a hittin' kind of person. I will hit in a minute. That's why I have to be very careful today. You can't do that [laughing]. You can't hit 'em today. But those old girls used to say, "Ms. Chase. Don't hit me. Please don't hit me." [laughing].

Candacy Taylor:

I think Barack Obama probably feels special that you hit him. He'll probably remember that the rest of his life.

Leah Chase:

[still laughing] I can't, I can't....so the whole neighborhood found out that, and across the street is the housing units and they said, "That's right Ms. Dooky. You told him right, don't mess up your gumbo!" [laughing] But he was such a smart man, such a kind man, and just so humble and so...he was an unbelievable man.

[25:11]

John Fenn:

Again, that was Leah Chase talking about when she had to slap Barack Obama's hand. Another amazing moment was when Leah Chase talks about sending Michael Jackson some sweet potato pies. Let's hear that clip as well.

Candacy Taylor:

Talk about Michael Jackson. He liked your peach cobbler?

Leah Chase:

He liked my sweet potato pie.

Candacy Taylor:

Oh, sweet potato pie.

Leah Chase:

Michael, I fed him when he was a little boy. Last time I saw Michael he was about 14 years old and I didn't see him anymore. I saw the brothers, Jermaine and Tito and all those people, but Michael, I never saw him anymore. When Michael died that really hit me hard because the bodyguard that he had when he came to New Orleans would go to visit him in California and I would send Michael sweet potato pies. So I never sent Michael a sweet potato pie in a long time, and I got upset. I couldn't figure out, where was your mother, Michael? When you needed somebody, of course you were different than your brothers, but you were there. Where were they? How we let you down like that? Just thought about you and the money. And I used to tell my daughter, "You see if I would have sent Michael his sweet potato pies..." And she said, "Mother, you couldn't do anything about the way Michael lived."

[26:50]

Steve Winick:

So again, that was Leah Chase of Dooky Chase's restaurant in New Orleans. And we are talking with Candacy Taylor about the interviews she did for the Green Book project. Now I've been dying to see the film *One Night in Miami*, and I'm intrigued by the Hampton House where the film largely takes place. And I know you visited undocumented that historic hotel, and you interviewed two different people about it. And you mentioned that the neighborhood in which the hotel was located was still in pretty rough shape when you went and visited it. So tell us a little of that story.

Candacy Taylor:

Yes. When I went to visit the Hampton House, it was, again, it was so exciting because I did have these two interviews scheduled that were pretty hard to get, honestly, I had been, it was kind of a last minute thing and it was, I think it, Christmas day I spent, yeah, I spent Christmas day in Orlando that year because I had this interview on the 26th and I had to drive all the way down to Miami. And I was so excited to get the the interviews because the Markowitz family it was a Jewish family who ran the Hampton House, but it was Enid Pinkney. The woman who actually is the reason why it was restored. And she was an, she was a black woman. And she was in her seventies, I believe when she realized that the Hampton House was, you know, became her mission to save it because it had been sitting in shambles since the sixties, the place where Martin Luther King would swim with friends and family literally was just overgrown.

And there was a tree growing out of the swimming pool and it was basically a place for, you know, people who were squatters and addicts and, you know, it just had been abandoned and neglected for, for decades. So Enid remembered as a child or as a young person, you know, having fun at the Hampton House and remembered from, you know, her in her twenties going there and loving it and it just broke her heart. So she became, she spearheaded this campaign to bring it back to life. And although she didn't have any experience as a preservationist, she became one. And, you know, again, she started this like in her seventies. So it just, and now it's undergone like a \$10 million renovation and

it is brought to its pristine level of what it wants was it's is a mid century beautiful building. And all of those details have been brought back to life, almost identical to what it was.

So it's been a huge labor of love. And and so, yeah, it's, it's exciting that now it's becoming a part of popular culture and there's this recognition because so many historical things that happened there that, you know, Cassius Clay came in and was proselytized by Malcolm X and he left as Muhammad Ali. I mean, that's a story that has you know, that has been told about the Hampton House and the idea that we almost lost it, that it was just really, I mean, it's just one woman, Enid was the reason why we, why we still have it, and there's other Green Book sites like that too, that, you know, these monumental historical things happened in our culture and that there's no recognition, no acknowledgement and no support to preserve it.

[30:18]

Steve Winick:

Yeah. That's amazing. So let's hear Dr. Pinkney talk about why the Hampton House was so important.

Enid Pinkney:

Hampton House was like a respite for people who could feel comfortable in an elegant place. I think that Hampton House is special because of what happened here because Dr. Martin Luther King used to stay here and we have a picture of him in the swimming pool, in his trunks, relaxed here at the Hampton House. This was, was, was one of his favorite spots. And Muhammad Ali stayed here. Malcolm X stayed here. And in fact, Malcolm X proselytized him here at the Hampton House. And this, that was when he changed his name after the fight with Sonny Liston, that he had his victory party here when he beat Sonny Liston in that cafe downstairs. And the CORE had its regular meetings here at the Hampton House. Dr. Martin Luther King first said his "I Have a Dream" speech at the Hampton House. Eddie Moore, who has recently passed, and he said that he was sitting right next to Dr. King when he gave the speech. And he said he, it was just so magnificent

Steve Winick:

That was Enid Pinkney, who was the CEO of the Historic Hampton House Community Trust, casually mentioning Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and Cassius Clay all staying at the hotel and King practicing the "I Have a Dream" speech there. What did you think when you first heard these stories, Candacy?

Candacy Taylor:

Well, it almost brought tears to my eyes, because again, I just thought the heaviness of this moment, these are, you know, Titans of, of civil rights and African American

culture. And the fact that we are so ignorant, I think of our, of our living history. And, and there is something palpable about visiting these places and being in that space and walking around that pool. To me, it was, you know, I would get chills because you could see it. You could see there's obviously we have photographs to show what was happening there, but you can feel it. And there's this visceral feeling. And I think that's, to me, what is, so what is missing from even if the history books get it right? Which that's another issue. A lot of them don't. And the history that we grew up with in this country is not accurate a lot of times, especially when it comes to black history, but even reading it in a book or understanding it through, you know, through knowledge that either somebody is sharing stories with you, but being in that space and standing in these places and talking to people who were there and who remember it being in front of them.

I mean that just to me, it's made all those black and white images come to color. And so that was a, a gift, you know, that I didn't, I wasn't really expecting it to be that powerful. In terms of the resonance of this history coming to life.

[33:49]

Steve Winick:

Now, you also talked to Jerry Markowitz who was the son of the original owners of the Hampton House, and they were Jewish. And I found it interesting that he thought that his parents might've understood that other hotels not letting black people stay, was wrong because Jews were sometimes subject to the same treatment. Let's hear that clip.

Jerry Markowitz:

You know, they were long time residents of South Florida, and they were part of the Jewish community, which suffered from a lot of the same issues that black folks had. In fact my partner, my former law partner, who just retired as a judge and he found a letter, his cousin sent him for Mobile Alabama from like 1942, where the owner of a hotel wrote to one of his former customers saying, you know, we had previously allocated eight hotel rooms to Jewish people. And we had to make a decision whether we were going to cater to Jewish people or Gentile people. And we made the decision, we were going to cater to, you know, Gentile people. So thank you for your business, but you're not welcome here anymore. There was a series of very, very polite letters going back and forth that end in the owner of this hotel saying, you know, we really did the wrong thing. You know, you can stay here again. But I, I have to think that partly because of that, you know, the Jewish community in South Florida, we didn't view black people in the same way that maybe other people did, you know.

Steve Winick:

So how did you react to hearing that story, Candacy?

Candacy Taylor:

Well, you know, it was interesting is even though I've scouted and cataloged all of these Green Book sites and the Jewish stories do continue to come up. And, you know, as I mentioned earlier, when that's how Victor Green, one of the reasons why he got the idea to do the Green Book was because of his Jewish friend using a kosher guide. To me, you know, when I met Jerry, you know, he was still one step removed on us. I mean, it was really Enid that had this kind of visceral response because she was there and she was active in actually making sure that this still existed. But you know, Jerry's stories were interesting through the eyes of his parents because they were of that time and he was a kid, he was there as a, a bus boy, I may stand corrected, maybe a busboy.

Steve Winick:

He mentioned being a busboy, and filling Malcolm X's coffee at one point.

Candacy Taylor:

Right. And so for him to have this experiences, you know, he was young and realized that, well, yeah, the reason why the Hampton House was so critical and was so popular because all the black musicians, you know, were playing, you know, in, in Miami beach, but they couldn't stay there. And so they would go inland to the community where the Hampton House was, which was an all black community so that they could, that's where they played. That's where they played the b sides, that's where they relaxed. And that's where this culture really kind of came to life. And so for black and white people and the family, like the Markowitz family, I mean, that was where, you know, the, the real culture happened. And so the fact that they facilitated that and supported that and celebrated, that was really special.

And it's hard to know out of the 10,000 sites that I've been documenting, you know, which ones were, how many were black owned and how many were Jewish owned and, or, you know, other ethnicities, or just simply white owned, because there were a lot of Green Book sites in the sixties in the later editions, Macy's and Disneyland and bigger brand names, The Waldorf Astoria, The Algonquin, there were these really fancy upscale, white owned places that were in the Green Book, but it's places like the Hampton House where, you know, that, that family, you know, they got it early and they knew integration was coming. And they knew that there was, there was creating a need in a service that was invaluable to not just black folks, but especially in places Southern Florida, where integration was not, was still frowned upon. I took a lot of courage to do that. So it was, it was great to get those two perspectives.

[38:15]

John Fenn:

We've listened to a few clips and shared them that Steve and I chose. But we want to give you an opportunity to talk about an interview that stands out to you.

Candacy Taylor:

Oh gosh. I loved speaking with Nelson Malden. He was Dr. King's barber and he worked on the first floor of the Ben Moore hotel in Montgomery, Alabama. And again, this is where King strategized the Montgomery bus boycott.

And he tells a story about, you know, that they are waiting at, because it was right across the street where the bus stop was. And all the guys in the barbershop were looking at first day when the bus strike was supposed to happen. And they knew that this one man would always get on the bus. I don't know what time...really early in the morning. And they said, you know, when they saw that he didn't get on the bus that day, they knew that it was real, that it was really going to happen because everybody was saying, Oh, I'm not going to get on the bus. But you know, when it comes time to make that sacrifice, a lot of humans, you know, we just can't do it. And, but they knew that that was the day that the Montgomery bus boycott started and that it was going to actually mean something. And then that's history in the making. So stories like that were incredible.

I also wanted to mention Herbert Sulaiman. He was an incredible, he's almost like a version of Enid Pinkney. He started rehabbing and getting a campaign to restore Charlie's Place, which was in Myrtle beach, South Carolina. And that was a fascinating story that he tells, and I interviewed two people, Dino Thompson and Herbert Sulaiman about that. And they, it was just, again, an incredible opportunity to learn about the history and the beach, culture, and music that was happening on the coast there, how it was very specific and different. And sadly, we lost Herbert. He passed, I believe within the last year. And he became a friend to me and we would keep in touch while I was on the road. And, and so, you know, I really wanted to celebrate him and what's happening with the, with Charlie's is again, they're under way with a renovation. We don't, it's not completed yet, but they've definitely made a lot of strides in that. And that's thanks to him.

[40:42]

John Fenn:

Well, we have time for one more clip. So let's listen to a clip from the Nelson Malden interview that Candacy mentioned, but we want our listeners to know that all these interviews are available at loc.gov.

Candacy Taylor:

So go ahead, I interrupted you.

Nelson Malden:

But anyway, that was one of the...there was Bayard Rustin, he went walking down at the March on Washington with A. Phillip Randolph, he lived in the hotel. And then of course Benjamin Mays, when he came through Montgomery at the time he preached, Vernon Johns, which was one of the pastors at Dexter [Baptist Church] before the

Reverend came. And we had B.B. King, stayed in the hotel, Ruth Brown, any and everybody and Joe Louis came to town one time, he passed through Montgomery. He stayed in the Ben Moore Hotel.

Candacy Taylor:

Did you do his hair?

Nelson Malden:

No, we didn't do Joe Louis' hair. I did Benjamin Mays, the President of Morehouse, you know...they spend a lot of time, just to kill the time, you know. Everything was in that little area, that restaurant, right on the corner, that restaurant was the same building as the barbershop. And then the hotel [was on] the second floor and then the night club was on the top floor.

Candacy Taylor:

So what about...CORE was there, right? SNCC...into the '60s? And King. Did you ever see Dr. King?

Nelson Malden:

Well he was one of my customers. I started cutting his hair in 1954, when he first came to Montgomery. I was also a student at Alabama State College at that time, so I had a 10 o'clock class that morning and I saw a young man drive up in his blue Pontiac, he got out and I looked at his head, like any barber would do, I thought heck, I can knock him out in 15 minutes. It'd take me about five minutes to walk to the counter, so he came in the barbershop. I asked what was his name, he said, "Martin Luther King." I said, "Where are you from?" [He said] "Atlanta, Georgia" I said, "What are you doing in town?" He said, "I'm here to preach my sermon at Dexter. I said, "Oh, it's nice to meet you." So after I finished cutting his hair I gave him the mirror to see if he liked his haircut, he told me, "pretty good." So you tell a barber "pretty good," that was an insult, but he came back two weeks later, I was busy and another barber was vacant but he waited on me, so I remember that sarcastic statement he made and I said, "That must have been a pretty good haircut." He said, "You alright."

[42:54]

Steve Winick:

Once again, that was Nelson Malden of the Malden brothers barbershop, who was Dr. Martin Luther King's barber. And we are talking with Candacy Taylor about her Green Book project. I guess the big question is always, what can we learn from the Green Book? And maybe we could break that down now in African-American history month, to, what can black folks learn from it? And maybe what should white folks learn from it?

Candacy Taylor:

Well, the Green Book was definitely a lesson in simplicity and just pure agency. I mean, I think that, you know, in some ways, when I think of Victor Green who created the Green Book, he reminds me very much of Steve Jobs who put a, you know, I'm sure when he put a camera into a phone, he didn't realize it was going to become a civil rights tool. And I think in a similar way, Victor Green was solving an immediate problem. He just thought, well, I want to be able to go down 125th street and figure out where I can go in and where I don't have to sit in the balcony seats. And I just don't want, you know, the micro-aggressions of that are just tedious. And he just, he was trying to solve his own, his own problems. And yet what it grew into was this huge source of black entrepreneurship and ingenuity.

I mean, all of the businesses that were part of it was a whole network of progress within not just in each city, but the fact that you could be a black, I mean, a lot of there's a whole chapter in my book about women in the Green Book. And all of these women who had, you know, independent businesses and that were nightclub owners. And, you know, it was through these, the Green Book because then they had all of the tourists that would come and support their businesses. And I think today, you know, people say, Oh, we need a new Green Book today. And, you know, I guess people are using the brand of the Green Book in a lot of ways, which I don't think are really as yeah, I don't, I think they're kind of missing the point. It's not that we, because the laws did change in 1964. I mean, we, legally, as black people can go in nearly every business. I mean, whether, you know, we still may get harassed at Starbucks, right. And there's still a lot of, of racism and micro-aggressions that happen today just as they did before.

So in that way, things have not changed too much, but the idea of, you know, how do we shape these black owned businesses and support them in a way that is so critical to change in the dynamic of banking? I mean, I think it needs to be beyond just, you know, go of course, go to, if you have an option to go to a black owned business support that black owned business, and there's a lot of great apps and things that are coming up inspired by the Green Book to do that, which I think is great, but how do we really, you know, after black lives matter and all the George Floyd protests and all these corporations that came up and said, Oh, we're on your side. It's like, well, then really show us because the capital, the numbers in terms of equality in the larger echelons of banking of access of, you know, especially around business are still not there yet. So I think the pressure to use the Green Book to really show, okay, if you believe in this and you really want change and you want equality, then we still have a lot of work to do.

And so I hope to continue to use it in that way, but but yeah, it's, it's an inspiring thing. And to think that, you know, it's really just by accident that we kind of stumbled onto it as historians. And about 2007, I believe it was Calvin Ramsey who really started, you know, he learned about the Green Book. And it was his, he's kind of the godfather of this research. He calls me his Green Book spouse. They were the only two for awhile that were really getting articles published and kind of sharing information about this history, that black folks, you know, we black and white, a lot of people didn't know about it. So it's exciting that we get to rediscover it now and that it's at the Library of Congress.

[47:01]

John Fenn:

Yeah. I think your point about kind of knowing the history is not just to know it, but to activate it now. And so as we mentioned, the top of the podcast, your book is out *Overground Railroad*, the *Green Book* and the *Roots of Black Travel in America*. And we know you've been working on all sorts of other projects related to this research. Can you give us a quick rundown? So our listeners know what to look for and listen for from you?

Candacy Taylor:

Sure. Well currently I'm the content specialist and curator for an exhibition with the Smithsonian. It's the Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition service. So they...we've developed an exhibition that's about over 3000 square feet and it will travel the US for three years through 2024. And it's currently at the National Civil Rights Museum. And then it will go to the Mosaic Templars Museum in Arkansas, in Little Rock, Arkansas, this summer. So if you go to the website for a Smithsonian, the exhibition is called *Negro Motorist's Green Book*. So you can follow the, the itinerary and the tour for that. I'm developing a mobile app that I hope to release next year, early next year, along with, I'm doing a children's book for ages nine to 12 that's a children's version of *Overground Railroad*, so that we just completed the edits for that. And that will be published next January. Developing a board game based on *Overground Railroad*, and yeah, there's, and there's a couple other projects too, in the works.

So again, this material is so rich and I think there's so many different ways to engage it and understand it. And again, like you said, it's that living with it, that the book is doing one thing, but I, Oh, and I also just finished a project with national geographic. I did a digital interactive map, a story map that they may be releasing soon, but it'll be out there within the next couple of months, but that is just been completed too. And that traces black social mobility over the last hundred years through the lens of the *Green Book*. So we're looking at lynching sites and I'm looking at sundown towns and obviously *Green Book* sites, but also it takes us today into a mass incarceration. So yeah, so there's a lot going on.

Steve Winick:

Yeah. All of that sounds amazing. And I love the way there's contemporary technology like mobile apps, but also kind of old school stuff like board games and children's books and all of the creative things that you're doing with this material that you've researched is just a pleasure to hear about. And it really has been a pleasure talking with you once again, this has been Candacy Taylor here on the *Folklife Today* podcast. And we should mention that the *Green Book* isn't her only project, or even her only project to be awarded an Archie Green fellowship by the American Folklife Center. So for more of Candacy Taylor's interviews in our occupational folk life project collection, just search

for her name. And it's spelled C A N D A C Y at loc.gov, and for updates on her other projects, visit taylormadeculture.com with Taylor spelled with a Y

John Fenn:

Candacy. Thank you so much for being with us today. It's been an honor and a pleasure.

Steve Winick:

Yes. Thanks so much for being here.

Candacy Taylor:

Yeah, I had fun. It was good interview. Thank you.

Steve Winick:

We should also thank our engineer, Jon Gold and our colleague Nancy Groce, who hosts our sister podcast. America works. Nancy has worked closely with candacy on her project for the American Folklife Center, and she helped organize this interview.

John Fenn:

We should also thank our colleagues throughout the Library of Congress who help us deploy this podcast once we finally finished it.

Steve Winick:

And finally, thanks to you. The listener, we'll see you next time on Folklife Today.

[50:55]

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at loc.gov