

## Doc Chat Episode Forty-Five Transcript

### A Guide to Black Travel Guides (February 24, 2022)

IAN FOWLER: Welcome everyone. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us for Doc Chat. My name is Ian Fowler. I'm the curator of Maps for New York Public Library. Doc Chat is a weekly program series from NYPL Center for Research in the Humanities that digs deep into the stories behind the library's most interesting collections and highlights ways that teachers can incorporate them into the classroom. In this episode, Rhonda Evans and Julie Golia will analyze Travelguides used by African Americans to help them navigate the experience of travel during the early and mid-20th century, when racially discriminatory laws were widespread. Rhonda Evans is the Assistant Chief Librarian of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, where she supports the management of the Research and Reference Division's diverse collections that focus on people of African descent throughout the world. Julie Golia is the Curator of History, Social Sciences, and Government Information, and the author of "Newspaper Confessions: A History of Advice Columns in a Pre-Internet Age." Our guests will speak for about 15 minutes before we open up the conversation to a Q&A. During the program, feel free to use the chat function to share general comments. Though, make sure you change your chat mode to panelists and attendees, so everyone is included. Once we begin the question-and-answer segment, please use the question-and-answer function on the bottom of your Zoom screen and not the chat to pose your questions. If you wish to remain anonymous, please check that option before submitting your question. Julie and Rhonda please take over.

JULIE GOLIA: Thanks, Ian. Hey, Rhonda.

RHONDA EVANS: Hi, Julie.

GOLIA: So glad to be here with you today.

EVANS: Yeah, I'm really excited.

GOLIA: Will you share a little bit about what we're going to be talking about today?

EVANS: Absolutely. Yeah. So I am presenting to you today from the Schomburg Center Research and Reference Division and among our many printed and published items in our collection we have a great number of titles of Black travel guides. And I know that most people are very familiar with the Green Books, but there's actually quite a few Black travel guides that were out there at the time. So I'm really happy to kind of expand that conversation today.

GOLIA: We're going to be looking at some really lovely ones today that will complicate people's understanding of them and really give a sense of the diversity of them. And I think before we get into the content of them, we want to pull back a little bit and talk about the history around them. What were Black travel guides and what was the era they became popular in. And I think it's important for everyone to understand the context around just the prevalence of Jim Crow Laws largely in the south, but also in the north in the early and mid-20th century, that creates an environment of segregation and experiences of segregation, literally where everybody went. And part of -- I think what we're seeing this come out of is also the movement of so many Black people from the south to northern cities during the great migration, the rise of automobile ownership among Black Americans. I mean, to me, this is one of the primary sort of, we take this for granted I think in so many ways in the world that we live in today, but what it means to no longer have to travel on public transportation and the kind of safety that the automobile environment would bring to people. And so these are just, I think some of the big phenomena that are shaping the rise of these, right?

EVANS: Yes, absolutely. Yes. So the rise of the automobile, of -- and we'll talk too, a little bit with changing kind of class demographics, access to airplanes, to trains, to ships, to other types of transportation as well.

GOLIA: And I mean, even going back a little bit further, I also think it's important to point out the importance of the experience of travel and mobility for Black Americans in the context of the civil war and the end of slavery in the United States. Much of the experience of slavery for Black Americans was the limitation on your ability to go places, to see family, to move about the country.

EVANS: Exactly.

GOLIA: And so even that longer history there, I think really informs the social meaning of travel, right?

EVANS: Absolutely.

GOLIA: And I mean, but I think also like with when we bring in this sort of experience of Jim Crow, you know, normally we associate the idea of vacationing, our traveling with relaxation. And if you are navigating both the complexities and the humiliations of segregation, that is almost the anathema of what you would want a vacation to be.

EVANS: Yeah. And that's kind of where these travel guides come in, right? So the idea of trying to make this experience of traveling from place to place a lot less stressful for African Americans and kind of, you know, some of the things that you will see in these travel guides are, you know, we think of normal things just like hotels and places to eat, but there was all kind of entries in these travel guides to help the idea of kind of promoting the safe travel and travel again with like out humiliation, right? So it would not just include hotels or inns, but rooming houses, boarding

houses, kind of like what we think of like an Airbnb people just renting out, who would rent out rooms, gas stations. They would also have mileage in the travel guides because, you know, you might be able -- you might have to go really long distance without being able to stop at a gas station because there you would pass a number of gas stations that would not allow African Americans. So having that mileage and being able to plan, you know how far you could go before you're at some place that will serve you. But they even include things like articles and highlights and advertisements. So it's a mixture of a lot of things.

GOLIA: Yeah. Actually, that mileage point is so fascinating. What an interesting thing. And actually, something for teachers I think to think about.

EVANS: Right.

GOLIA: And a great way of proposing inquiry for your students, if you're using these. Rhonda, you mentioned the Green Books and how they're kind of like at the forefront of our popular culture, understanding of Black travel guides, why are people so you know, like focused on the Green Books, do you think, and you know, why is it so important to look at other versions?

EVANS: Yeah. So the Green Books, again, we kind of can't ignore the impact that the film had [brief laughter]. So the film definitely brought, you know, a lot of attention to the Green Books and, you know, they were also coming from my knowledge, the longest running, continuously running Black travel guides. So they started in 1936. And as you can see on the slide here all the way up through the '60s, whereas the other travel guides were, you know, not as continuous, did not go on for this long. And also these guides, the Green Books were really meant for the, kind of like the, every man for everybody, right? Like they had a purpose of like, you know, you didn't have to be wealthy or, you know, you could just be your average person who's traveling. And this book was kind of meant for everyone to use, to get to their destination in a safe way. But the other travel guides, you know, just like in publishing now kind of had their niche market. You know, this is kind of for every man, but others were for, you know, as we talk about there's class issues, there's, you know, a focus on being able to travel in different methods. So it's important to look at the other ones, because they do kind of address different demographics, different issues and they have different audiences, different target audiences as well.

GOLIA: Yeah. And I think that, that's what I'm so excited for us to dig into today is I think it really shows the diversity of experience of Black Americans at the time. And this wasn't one monolithic experience. So let's dig into them. So we're looking here at Travelguide. Tell us a little bit about Travelguide.

EVANS: Yeah. So Travelguide started in 1946. So this is a decade after the Green Book started to come out and they were founded actually by a musician named Billy Butler. So Billy Butler was kind of a big deal, during his time he was conductor of the Shuffle Along orchestra. I mean, he wrote compositions for Arthur Waters, you know, he was a big deal. And so he tells this story

about when he was traveling in a vaudeville circuit in this play called the "Sheiks of Araby" or "Araby", I think you might say. And he and his colleagues were kind of looking for a place to eat. They weren't being welcomed anywhere. So one night they decided to go out in their full sheiks costume. And everyone thought that they were these distinguished, like dignitaries, everywhere they went, they were just being treated with like all this, you know, just the hype of luxury and respect because people thought they were not regular Black Americans. They thought that they were these Arab sheiks. And so he kind of thought like, well, we should be treated like this everywhere we go. And if we have the means to kind of pay for these types of services, like we should not be denied. So that's where it started. And, you know, he had investors like WC Handy and other people who kind of shared his same vision of what travel should be like. But specifically, you know, one of the issues that kind of separates this from the Green Books again is like, I keep mentioning this, but this is where it kind of comes in, is class. And in an article about him, I'll just read this really quick kind of quote that that was in the article. It said, "Mr. Butler said travel and other luxury purchases by colored people made possible by improvements in educational and employment opportunities for Negroes are making Americans increasingly aware of the variety of cultural and financial levels among Negroes. This knowledge will help overcome the tendency to classify all Negroes in one group and aid in the integration in their proper places in American society." So this guide, Travelguide is not just to help people get to places safely, but if you have the money and the means to kind of have this luxurious travel, this is who this guide is also serving and who the audience for these guides are.

GOLIA: That's so interesting. And I mean, I think in a lot of ways these covers do give off.

EVANS: I love them.

GOLIA: I mean, it really do see a difference here between this and the Green Book, right?

EVANS: Yeah.

GOLIA: Even just the use of photography, but these are -- we're looking at one from 1951 and one from 1955. These are for glamorous women.

EVANS: Yes.

GOLIA: That we're looking at here. Who are they?

EVANS: Yeah. And so that's interesting because if you go back to the Green Books, most of those were kind of illustrations, you know, a car, a road, but these are, as an older millennial, I would probably use the term influencers, but they were socialites, right? They were the one with the TWA plane, the woman on the steps is the wife of Jackie Robinson. Her name is Rachel. She's holding her fur coat. The one who's standing on the ground, her name is Elaine. And she was the wife of a very famous dancer named Bill Robinson. And the two women in the car, they are kind of fun. They're real socialites. The woman in the dark coat, her name is Ophelia

Dilworth, but she had kind of one of those socialite nicknames. They called her Skippy. And if you look her up in the newspapers every week, she had a party and everybody who was at her party is the who's who of Black New York elite. And then in the white coat, we have Olivia Stanford who owned Olivia's House of Beauty and did -- she was the who's who, you know, went to her salon, right? So these are -- these women are women who are actually like real socialites and real people that, you know, you might want to be or look up to. And obviously, you know, they have the access to kind of do all these wonderful things, like ride a plane or ride a -- driving a Cadillac, you know, I think that's says a lot. But yeah, so it's interesting to see that they use these real kind of influential people on the cover of their guides.

GOLIA: I mean, it really is, and I will say again the people who are thinking about teaching with this and the relevance today, it really is like very influencers, you can see [brief laughter]. This is almost like sponcon [brief laughter] a little bit, you know, I mean, you can really see the ties, I think, to today and all of these markers, as you said, the fur coat. I love the golf clubs and the backseat of the car.

EVANS: And I think we can't minimize that the golf clubs in the car because I mean, talk about a sport [brief laughter] that has been really inaccessible to Black people for a number of reasons. I mean, thinking about like golf club, country club access and all of that to have that symbol of golf clubs on this guide cover in 1955, I feel like it is really a message right there. Yeah.

GOLIA: It's such a great point. And I mean, the other thing to me that is, I think so significant we'll look at another one right now. This is Go, and this one was published in 1955 is just how stylistically forward and modern these feel. These are not famous people by any research that Rhonda and I have done on them. But, boy, are they good looking.

[ Laughter ]

EVANS: Yes.

GOLIA: They give off a vibe of youth and luxury. And again, in a way I think that really speaks to like social media today.

EVANS: And think we were saying this before, like I see this photograph and I automatically want to be these people [brief laughter]. I totally want to wear what they're wearing. I want to be in that car. I want to see what they're seeing. So these are really like sending these messages again and, you know, kind of going beyond just, you know, safe travel, but also we're really getting into different types of consumerism here. We're getting to like your specialty advertising, right? So we're going into these again, the targeting people who have money to spend on vacations and luxury and travel, you know, and they're saying, yeah.

GOLIA: And I was just going to point out that this is actually the official directory of the Nationwide Hotel Association, which I think gives us this sort of maybe like a little bit of a sneak

peek. We've been really looking at almost like the front, the images, but also the, kind of the backend, like where some of these movements and these ideas are sort of coming together and who is organizing these. So the Nationwide Hotel Association, they were founded in the 50s, is that right, Rhonda?

EVANS: Yeah, they were founded in '53 by William H. Brown. And he was the manager of the Hotel Theresa in Harlem. And so for those who may not be familiar with that, it was also called the Waldorf of Harlem. And again, like everyone stayed there from Josephine Baker to Fidel Castro.

GOLIA: Wow.

EVANS: You know, and it's been featured so many times in like pop culture. It's a big part of Colson Whitehead's most recent book, so you know, very, very famous location. And he was the founder of this. So you know, kind of seeing what his vision is gathering other, you know, people related to this type of institutions or luxury travel locations for Black Americans at the time.

GOLIA: And one of the big things that the Nationwide Hotel Association advocated for were these kind of standards of luxury. And I think one -- often when we think, I think especially a lot because of the movie, "The Green Book", we're often thinking we're very focused on these issues of safety. Like the kind of like the very practical negotiations of a segregated society, but part of what this business association, this very capitalist rooted business association --

EVANS: Very much so.

GOLIA: Was doing and saying, and also we need standards of luxury, right? Like, just because we're -- we want to make sure that the Black hotels that we're sending people to have great sheets and great resources for them, and that they create an environment in which people are going to spend their money and spread the word and want to come back.

EVANS: Right, exactly. So places that for people who are able to attend the Hotel Theresa like Josephine Baker and WC Handy, you know, what type of places can they stay in? Because they have the money to really you know, afford different types of luxuries, so kind of pulling their resources to create this type of guide.

GOLIA: People have money to spend, and we want to create places for them to do that safely.

EVANS: Absolutely.

GOLIA: Part of the way that these were funded, of course, that these were published and that they made the ways that made money was advertising. And I think if anyone spent some time flipping through these, which you can in person at the Schomburg Center or also digitally on our digital collection. So we'll see that advertising is an enormous sort of percentage of the content

of many of these books. And tell us, I think also something about who were the ideal readers here.

EVANS: Absolutely.

GOLIA: And I think, you know, to just add a little bit of context around this, and in the beginning of the 20th century, people were really thinking about advertising and from a very mass market perspective, how can we get as many eyes on our ads as possible and what you start to see in the 1950s and moving forward is this almost this niche application of advertising, let's locate these niche audiences, create really specific and targeted ads toward them and market to them in those particular ways. And now of course, we're at the apotheosis of this, right? We're --

EVANS: Yes.

GOLIA: [inaudible] they know the insides of our brains, but we really see this happening, I think, in the pages of these travel guides.

EVANS: Absolutely. I mean, and just looking at kind of the examples that we have up on the screen right now, I mean, you know, we talked about influencers, but here we have the celebrity endorsers, Cab Calloway, Buddy Johnson, you know, and they're saying you could be like them, because you too will enjoy smooth and sociable Schenley Liquor, right? And then we have the Black History message here, George Washington Carver, and kind of showing their appreciation and their understanding, right? Very targeted and you can even get, as it says, a free Negro history calendar from --

GOLIA: We love that [brief laughter] yes, absolutely.

EVANS: Yeah. So yeah, so they're kind of hitting it from all angles there.

GOLIA: And Schenley is a white owned liquor company based in the Southern United States. So this is not like this is a Black owned company focusing on its Black audience. This is a very mainstream corporation as is of course Philip Morris, the cigarette maker. And I think on here it seems like they're really coming back to those themes about class, and aspiration that you laid out at the beginning. I mean look at this another person we want to be.

EVANS: Yeah, absolutely.

GOLIA: This beautiful woman.

[ Laughter ]

EVANS: And just the details. I mean, that dog is clearly very well groomed [brief laughter], right? It's like to perfection like the haircut and she has her matching luggage and her cigarette and her magazine.

GOLIA: That's right.

EVANS: Yeah.

GOLIA: And a very particular vision of black beauty that we see complicated, I think in the years to come, but light skin, tall, thin, you know, and I think, you know, once we move into an era of Black power, we start to see this complicated a little bit, but this is, I think very indicative of what we see at this time.

EVANS: Right.

GOLIA: And I think, you know, in addition to these kind of big mainstream national advertisements, there are also advertisements for local or like the local hotels that are featured in this. And we wanted to end on this one last story because this hotel, I think is a great example of the way that we can use these travel guides and then potentially, you know, have students go on research hunts for the kinds of things that they find in them. So very briefly the Moulin Rouge was a hotel. It was actually the first segregated hotel in Las Vegas on the west side. And it had a big heyday of about five months in 1955 where it opens its lavish doors and then closed by the end of the year because of bankruptcy but went on with new ownership until 1960. When in Las Vegas, you see the historic Moulin Rouge agreement in which owners and city leaders meet at the Moulin Rouge and agree for a mass desegregation of strip hotels and casinos. So this one advertisement led, you know, me down a rabbit hole of this one story. And that's just one of the many I think that we have of sort of captured in these amazing --

EVANS: And again, yeah, and it's a great point. It brings up kind of other issues to explore with these travel guides, kind of the idea of the Black tax, right? Like they -- the Black, you know, population could stay there, but they were getting charged just so much more, you know, so those were other type of issues that people had to deal with. So again, like you said, this one advertisement just brings up so many different things and that's what's really interesting about these travel guides.

GOLIA: Great place I think for us to hand it back over to Ian.

FOWLER: Thank you both so very much. This has been wonderful and fascinating and very intellectually fruitful, I would say. Our first question comes from our colleague, Emily Walls. How is the information or recommendations sourced for these guides, if a town or city isn't featured, can we infer that that town wasn't safe or is it just evidence of a lack of information?



EVANS: So I think that's a great question. And I think that the different guides kind of handled it differently. So I think from Travelguide and I do have kind of -- I brought -- so you kind of see the -- there's a call kind of copies that I have with me. I think there, they had people who would actually go around and request people who were interested in having their locations included in the guide. They would kind of say, you know, this is the opportunity for people to see your place. If you wanted to put an advertisement or just a listing in there, I think with the Green Books, they definitely went out and did a lot of their own scouting. So I think it kind of came through in a lot of different ways and as they kind of grew in popularity, people wanted to be included in these guides because, again, it was a way of continuing to make money. Yeah.

FOWLER: Fascinating. Thank you. Going through watching the presentation, what I was struck by is the gender diversity that we see throughout the covers. Can you speak a little bit to that? Is that reflected in the guides kind of more largely?

EVANS: Yeah. Julie and I kind of notice this as well, going through, so again, kind of just like going through all these different covers of Travelguide, you know, they were almost all women and we don't have any, you know, direct evidence of why that might be, but we had theories, right? So it could have been if they were trying to target certain hotels and other places, it could be an idea of like making this image of like safety, right? Of these kind of very feminine women, you know, that could be in there, idea of maybe women were the ones who were planning the vacations and maybe those were the targets, right? So it could be more of kind of an advertising ploy, but they did usually have, or at least this Travelguide have women and Go, which sometimes have couples, but I also have some -- they would also kind of gear towards having women on their cover. So there could be a number of ideas and Julie, maybe you can speak more from the advertising perspective, but those are just some of the theories.

[ Laughter ]

GOLIA: Yeah. I mean, I think Rhonda you're right on. I think that, you know, since the turn of the 20th century, it's been long assumed by advertisers and maybe a bit more complex at the end of the 20th century that women are the primary purchasers, right? That they're the -- they're in a lot of ways the purse strings of the family. And then at the same time, there's also a question of kind of like the male gaze, like women are also who you would [inaudible], right?

EVANS: Right.

GOLIA: And who you commodify. And I think that plays out in all different kinds of publications. And I think the prevalence of advertising in these and because these were very consumer rooted, right? Like about spending money, women really would've been seen as a primary viewer and a primary purchase of these.

EVANS: Yeah.

FOWLER: That's great. Thank you. I'm going to combine two questions into one, which is my power as host [brief laughter]. Pre-1930 was this information available in like African American newspapers or other periodicals, and then can you also speak to why they stopped being published?

EVANS: So I have, you know, one of the travel guides that we have, I think the earliest we have is 1930. And so and that's a really interesting one. I just want to pull the name up; it's called "Hackley & Harrison's Guide for Color Travelers." And the issue that we have in the digital collection is really fun because it has a letter from Du Bois asking a travel question. So that's the early, but you can get other -- you can look at African American historical newspapers specifically I can't remember how old the Afro American was, but they did have travel columns and other type of advertisements and newspapers. And we do have Black travel guides that go into the 1970s and beyond that. And so I don't know if they actually ever really stopped. I think they're just kind of few and far between, you know, the NAACP still issues travel warnings for African Americans for different places in the United States. So the idea of sharing travel knowledge, and again, this has become like a whole niche luxury industry of targeting again the Black elite. So you'll find all different types of travel magazines and other types of publications for African American communities who want to do budget travel. So in a way, this has never really ended, it just kind of shows up in different ways. And before 1930, there are other, you know, publications and you'll see it a lot newspapers as well.

GOLIA: And I'll just add that I keep harping on the internet and the concept of an influencer, but I actual -- that there are also very popular and well followed Black travel influencers.

EVANS: Absolutely.

GOLIA: On social media today, which in a lot of ways; is like the modern version of a lot of these. It's both the democratization of it and like a digitization of it. But you can see, I think that's the great thing about looking at these old versions, like the kind of the origins of a lot of that today.

EVANS: Yeah. And it's exactly the same, you know, like just how we see these covers of Travelguide, where they're just like looking beautiful and they're happy and there's someplace wonderful. We see that on Instagram now, too, right? They're doing the exact same thing. They're making themselves beautiful in a place where you want to be. So it's really the same concept. It's just [multiple speakers] --

GOLIA: And I think that part of what they're doing, which is inherently political like these, is they're saying, look at me, look at a -- like and a lot of them are women, look at me, a Black woman in a space that you don't normally associate with Black people. Like one person I happen to follow on Instagram is this really wonderful woman who hikes all over Georgia. And like, and in a big part of her like statement is like, I'm a Black woman hiking in rural areas, you know? And like, let me complicate your vision of like, who seems to have their stamp on this

niche market. And then so there's like almost like an inherently political part of the work that she's doing.

EVANS: Yeah. And again, like with the Travelguide, the cover with those two wives, it made it very -- if you read the caption, it's very clear that like they're going to Europe, they're not just getting on this plane, they're going on the plane and they're going to travel to all the most luxurious places in Europe. So yeah, just making it so that we're everywhere and we're having vacations and just enjoying all of the world, you know, we're able to go anywhere we want to. And that kind of [inaudible] and that's what these Travelguides want people to see.

FOWLER: That is wonderful. Thank you both so very much. Apologies to our attendees for not getting to all the Q&A questions, but we have run out of time. I will put in the chat here we have a channel where you can see the blogs for all of our previous Doc Chats including transcripts and videos. And we will be sending out to everyone who attended and registered for this event a link to the log for this Doc Chat, which will have a list of resources. I know somebody asked about that, so that will be your one stop shop for where to find those resources for future and research. Please join us next week where NYPL Curator Linda Murray and dance historian Lynn Garafola explore photographs and drawings that illuminate the life and career of the ballet dancer and choreographer Bronislava Nijinska. Garafola and Murray will discuss the outsized and understudied impact that Nijinska had on the development of 19th century ballet choreography. And I will put a link to that in the chat now and then just a few more links for all of you. Please follow us on social media and keep in touch. We have a number of wonderful Doc Chats coming up and that's it for us today. Thank you both again so very much. This has been wonderful.