

NEH Curricular Project Racialized Spaces on Route 66

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Into the Wild and Why Chris McCandless Could Never Outrun His Ultimate Privilege

Rationale:

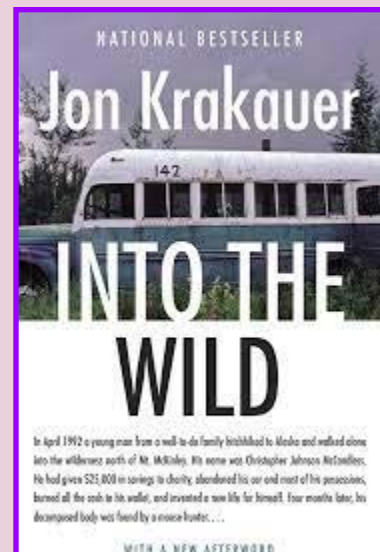
I teach Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* in my Senior English class and my students love to hate Chris and his actions. Who gives away all their money, burns what little they have left and ventures into the wild so woefully unprepared?

Chris tries so hard to outrun his privilege, to leave everything that his white, upper middle class upbringing has afforded him, behind; but what he does not realize is that he will never be able to shed the ultimate privilege: the fact that he is a white male in America and good looking (by all accounts) to boot.

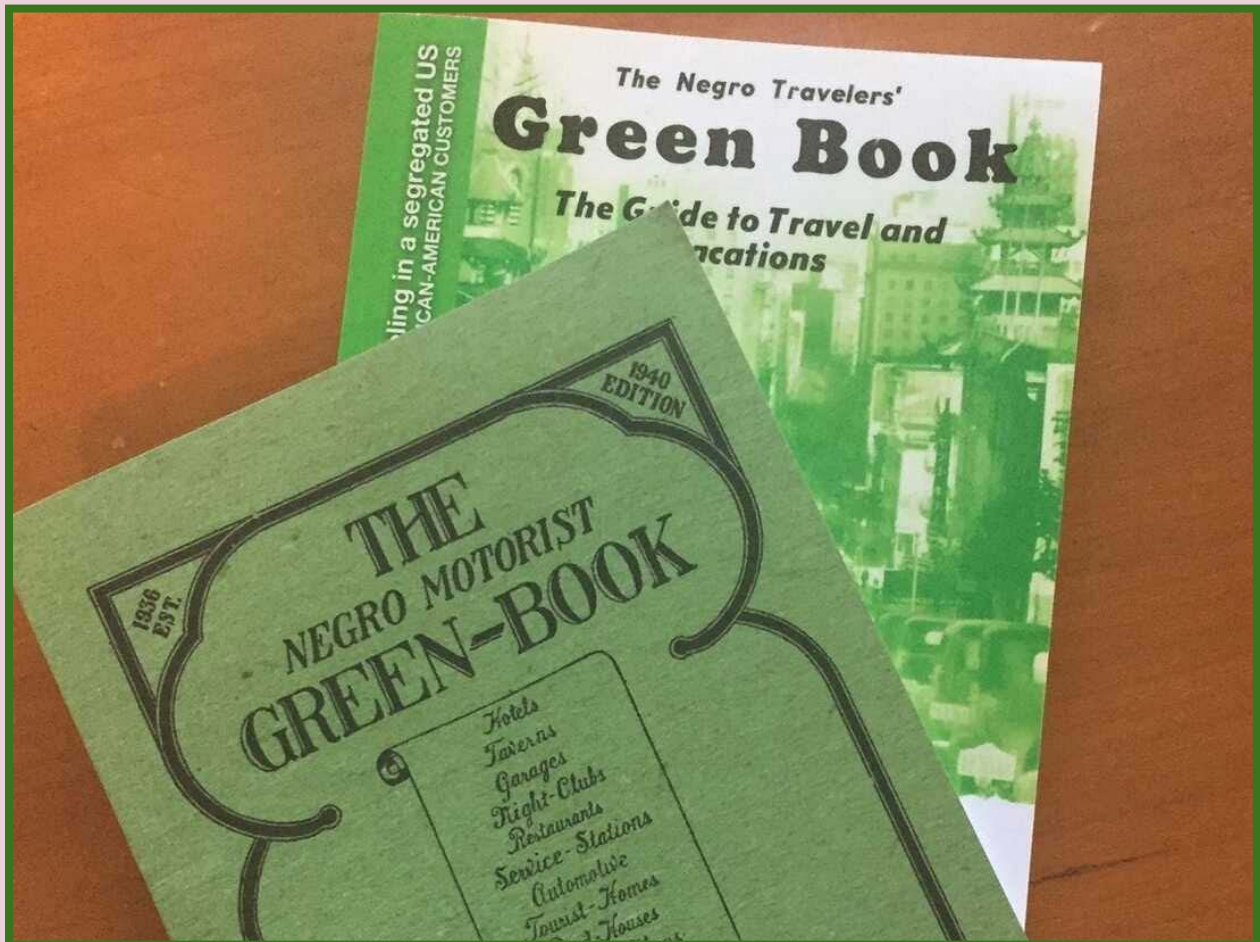
I ask my students how the story would have been different if

Chris was a woman, brown or black or anything other than a white young male.

How would the story have unfolded?



Enter: *The Negro-Motorist Green Book* by Victor H. Green



A book created to assist black travelers on their journey through America and beyond. In it black travelers will find businesses such as hotels, service stations, restaurants etc who are “willing” to serve black travelers.

Objective:

Compare and understand the different experiences of white and black travelers using the example of Chris McCandless and informational texts (list texts) about the black experience.

Lessons/Activities: This is a selection of lesson activities. They do not need to be all completed and also no in order, but they are meant to complement and enrich the *ITW Unit*:

1. Why We Travel...Research activity or journal prompt. This could be a presentation, an essay, a posterboard, a video. Brainstorm, survey, research why people travel.

2. Into the Wild ...West

The history of Route 66. Why was it built? How was its placement determined? How many miles, states did it span? When and why was it decommissioned?

Pair with *ITW* chapters 1, 2, 4.(Lesson Activities: Lecture, individual research, group research). Also pair with social studies.



3. Travelers welcome-but only the white ones!

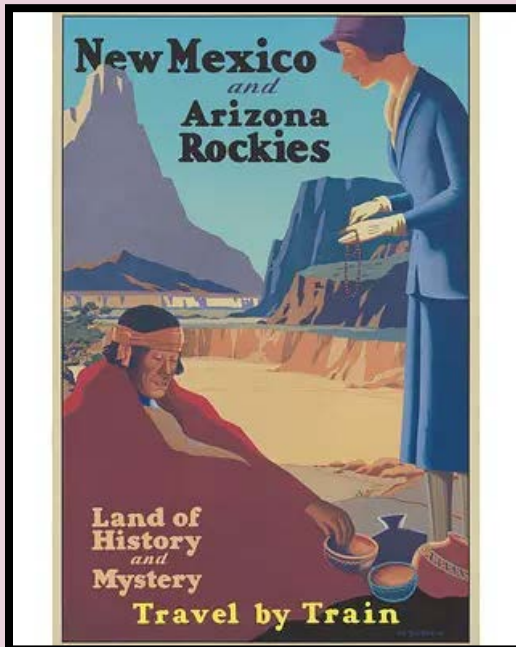
Sundown Towns, definitions, statistics, current status

Pair with *ITW* chapters 1, 6, chapters where Chris is put up by others.

(Lesson Activities: Juxtapositioned Postcards. Chris sends postcards to people who have helped him on his travels, have students create postcards from the black or brown traveler perspective from Sundown Towns, for example. Include image, text, quote from article or *ITW*)/ Also suitable to be paired with history lessons/social studies.

4. The effect of Route 66 on Indigenous Lands and Tribes

Displacement, division of land, stereotyping of the Wild West and “Indians” to attract (white) tourists.



Lecture or student research on history of Indian displacement, the nostalgia of the Wild West and/or “friendly savage”. Research advertisements, discuss accuracy of presentation, including implied messages and meaning. Pros and cons of tourism for native communities. (Chapter 5 *ITW*)

5. The need for community.

Chris thought he didn’t need anybody and separated himself from society. Compare his philosophy to accounts of blacks, Natives etc who were only able to survive because of community support.

Ideas, thoughts, extension activities:

- Find common locations listed in the Green Book and *ITW*

- Use Padlet Map to trace Chris's journey
- Discussion about maps. Who makes them? For what purpose? What story do they tell?
Who names places etc?
- Chris wants to escape and blacks, browns etc want to be part of society?

Culminating Project:

- Essay (prompts see below)
- Design a travel poster for any of the locations in *ITW* that accurately represents the area/
tourist attraction
- Create video/commercial for any of the locations mentioned in either *ITW* or *TGB*
- Compose a green book for where you live. What spots to visit, which to avoid. Be
specific!
- Create a travel brochure for 5 stops along Route 66.

Essay Prompts:

1. Chris McCandless was able to leave the life and expectations of his family behind and “hit” the road. His travels were dangerous, not always well planned and ultimately led to his death. Nevertheless, he received help from many places. Examining *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, what circumstances, made it possible for Chris to live the sort of life he wanted to live? What issues did he not have to worry about that others may have encountered? Discuss how *The Negro Motorist Green Book* informs your understanding of the privileges Chris may have taken for granted that allowed him to live as Alexander Supertramp. Cite evidence from both texts to support your claims.

2. Write a letter to Chris and imagine: If you were a black/brown/native/racially different traveler what would you tell Chris McCandless about his experience and your own personal challenges. How do they match? How are they different? What would you like Chris to know?

3. Analyze a travel poster. What story does it tell? Have students write an essay about a travel poster. Or students can examine posters for implied messages/bias. This activity allows for many different activities.





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"Todo el mundo reconocen American Express Travelers Cheques!"*

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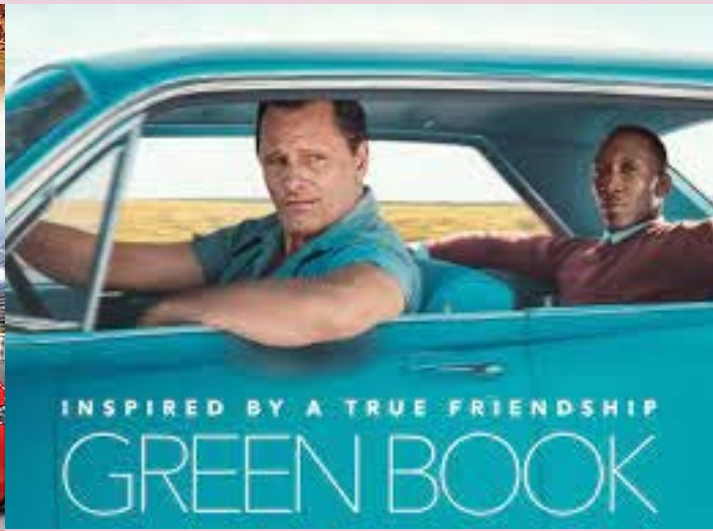
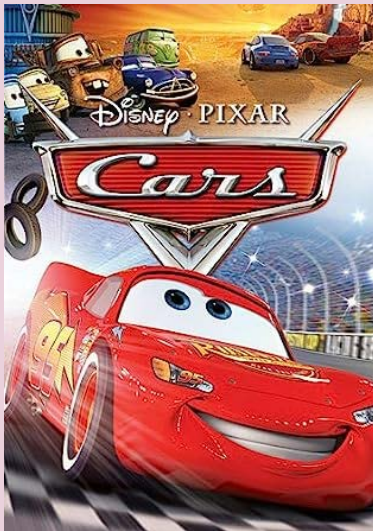


TRAVEL'S PURE FUN WHEN THE WORK'S ALL DONE BY AMERICAN EXPRESS

Have views on travel, racial groups, exploration of the (wild) West changed? If so, how? This also can be anything you want it to be: slides, video, essay, etc.

Other resources and media:

- Movie Clips from “The Green Book”, ” Cars”
- maps
- [Hatemap](#)



I can't show ITW because it is rated R.