Vacation without Humiliation

On a hot day in July 1963, members of the Senate Committee on Commerce listened to testimony regarding the civil rights bill. Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) began his testimony by reminding senators that “for millions of Americans this is vacation time. Swarms of families load their automobiles and trek across the country.” He suggested the committee imagine themselves “darker in color” on an auto trip across the country and asked:

How far do you drive each day? Where and under what conditions can you and your family eat? Where can they use a rest room? Can you stop driving after a reasonable day behind the wheel or must you drive until you reach a city where relatives or friends will accommodate you and yours for the night? Will your children be denied a soft drink or an ice cream cone because they are not white?

When questioned by Senator John O. Pastore as to what families did in these circumstances, Wilkins admitted, “You take your chances. You drive and you drive and you drive.” Unable to stop when tired because there were no accommodations, he said, “You keep on driving until the next city or the next town where you know somebody or they know somebody who knows somebody who can take care of you.”

Wilkins’s comments were supported by remarks from Senator Jacob Javits, who read into the record an article in Hotel Monthly about a black family denied accommodations at a motel in St. Petersburg, Florida. The “tired and hungry” family was riding in a “new Chrysler” and
the father, Ralph Sims, owned an appliance business worth a half million dollars. When Sims asked the price of a room, the motel owner quoted the outrageous price of $50,000. Sims said he would pay double the rate that the proprietor charged others because "I've got two kids out there. They haven't had a good meal all day, we're all exhausted and we can't find any place to sleep." The motel manager refused, and the story concluded: "That night the Sims family, who were Negroes, tried to doze curled up inside their parked car, counting the minutes until sunrise when they would begin hunting a colored restaurant for breakfast."

The family traveler was a common theme in testimony regarding public accommodations in the hearings for Title II of the civil rights bill of 1964. The remarks by Wilkins and Javits echoed the words of Martin Luther King Jr. in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, written a few months earlier. Defending the marches and protests against those who argued for patience, he wrote that it made him impatient "when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you."

The image of innocent children having to sleep in the car was aimed at public sympathy in an era of family togetherness. The comments of Wilkins and Javits were not mere coincidence but a calculated strategy to appeal to members of Congress, and to blacks and whites alike. In the face of Jim Crow laws in the South and persistent racial discrimination in the rest of the nation, the cultural icon of the family vacation was offered as persuasive evidence of the need for a federal law to ensure the rights of all citizens. Framing the experience of travel into a family narrative was essential to engendering sympathy for the civil rights struggle and led to the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In a nation where schools, housing, and society were segregated, vacationing was also segregated by race. Travelers in Jim Crow America—where whites and blacks were made to use different restrooms, drink at different water fountains, eat in different restaurants, and stay in different hotels—were citizens as well as consumers. Discrimination against black travelers meant that vacationing was a fundamentally different experience for them than it was for white families in cold war America. It was an uncertain, even fear-filled, experience because blacks never could be sure that they would find places to sleep and eat on the road. Indeed, African Americans often feared for their safety, even their very lives, as they traveled the dark highways of the Deep South. Historians of tourism have argued that travel was a way of affirming one's identity as an American.
and have argued that travel was a ritual of citizenship. By failing to acknowledge the meaning of race in the travel experience, we perpetuate “color-blind conceptions of national identity” of the culture of segregation. Racial segregation and discrimination while traveling demonstrated the limits of citizenship and complicated the claims of African Americans to American identity. At the same time, whether they intended to or not, white travelers sustained segregation with their travel dollars and shielded their children from understanding the true legacies of slavery.

To resist Jim Crow, by the 1930s blacks had created an entirely separate tourist infrastructure, including their own travel guides and travel agencies that directed travelers to places where they would be welcome without fear of humiliation. Tourism’s dual economy began to crumble as war veterans demanded their rights and as members of a growing black middle class claimed the privileges afforded them by their income. Because travel was bound up in consumerism and citizenship, both economic boycotts and political action were required for African Americans to become full consumers and complete citizens. The right to consume, to stay where you could afford to stay, eat where you could afford to eat, even to move freely on the highway, were inextricably bound up in rights of citizenship. As Roy Wilkins reminded the audience that hot July day in the Senate hearings, these “are people, human beings, citizens of the United States of America. This is their country.”

Although whites traveled freely to places they could afford, blacks were denied the right to travel the highways and eat and sleep where they pleased. To assert their rights as citizens, they drew on liberal ideals of fairness and on the principles of free enterprise in an expanding corporate economy. We may be familiar with the history of battles against discrimination on public transport, but how blacks battled the discrimination in public accommodations on the road, and how that was viewed through the lens of the family ideal, is an untold story.

Black Families on the Road

In July 1962, John Easterling of Denver, Colorado, wrote to the NAACP in New York City to lodge a complaint against the Mobil Oil Company. He and his wife and two children were on vacation together and were traveling through Shreveport, Louisiana. As he explained in his letter, “We have a credit card from Mobil Oil Co. so we stopped at Craigs Mobil Serv. To fill up our car & to use the rest rooms.” Then, he recounted, “while the attendant was putting in the gas, we saw signs for ladies and men rest rooms, knowing the south we ask for rest rooms
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& were informed they didn't have rest room facilities for coloured.” The women and children “were on their way to the ladies rest room, that was in plain sight.” He wrote that they “had to be called back, we then had to stop on the highway like animals.”

The Easterling family had the means to travel in their own car, and John Easterling earned enough to hold a credit card. However, their middle-class status meant nothing because of their racial status as “coloured” in the Deep South in the early 1960s. The proprietor of this Mobil Oil station was willing to sell them gas and take their money, but he adhered to Southern customs in providing restrooms for whites only. The refusal to let the Easterlings use the whites-only restrooms meant the family had to relieve themselves along the side of the road, “like animals.” Humiliated and angered, Easterling pressed the NAACP to file a suit.

Such incidents were typical of the discrimination reported in letters to the NAACP, written by those who carefully constructed stories of their mistreatment on the road. By 1946, the membership of the NAACP had grown rapidly to about 400,000 persons in over 1,000 chapters. Its dues-paying members expected the NAACP to take action on the letters of complaint written to the chapter officers, who then forwarded them to the national organization. The NAACP staff relied on the letters to identify targets and craft strategies in the fight for civil rights.

Those who wrote took care to point out that such incidents were doubly humiliating when family members were watching. Retired U.S. army captain Vance H. Marchbanks, who was returning from vacation with his wife and daughter in Los Angeles to Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, in June 1941, used that term to describe being denied the use of the restrooms and the water fountain at a Union Oil station in Opelika, Alabama. “I am a retired army officer, having served forty-four years in the army, and this is the most humiliating experience I have ever had, and we have traveled from coast to coast, and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico.”

Children were often perplexed by the refusal of attendants to let their families use their restrooms. James Smith and his family stopped at a Texaco station in Bessemer, Alabama, in July 1962, and while his car was being refueled, he “asked permission to use the lavatory.” An attendant “standing directly in front of the Men’s Room told me that he didn’t have a lavatory. My ten year old son, Dwight said, ‘there’s the bathroom right there.’” Dwight, a boy from Bridgeport, Connecticut, was unfamiliar with the segregated South, and he could not understand why his father was told there was no restroom when it was in plain sight.
Because the family vacation in postwar America was primarily an automobile touring operation, black families who traveled by car depended on the services of gas stations. Filling stations were generally franchises of the larger oil companies, independently owned but part of a larger network of suppliers. Oil companies were huge promoters of travel in this period, supplying not only gas and oil at a reasonable cost and on credit, but also amenities like free maps, clean restrooms, and water fountains. Customers came to expect those amenities, and the sign "clean restrooms" was a code signifying that women and children were welcome to use the facilities. By supplying clean restrooms, oil company franchisees signaled their eagerness to attract family travelers. The quid pro quo of gasoline purchases for restrooms was obvious to Mrs. Annie Hayes, who motored from Dallas to New York City with her husband in June 1947. She claimed they were denied the use of restrooms in Texas, Arkansas, and Tennessee. She felt it was unfair that dealers would sell them products "and not provide these comforts for us also."10

Most letters of complaint sent to the NAACP about discrimination at gas stations focused on segregated restrooms (although water fountains were also segregated). In no case did the gas station attendant refuse to fill the car with gas, and in many cases, black customers chose a certain station because they had a credit card for that brand. Although paying customers were sometimes refused access to the water fountain, more common was the refusal to allow customers to use the restrooms set aside for whites. In Southern states, such restrooms were built in response to state laws that mandated segregation in public accommodations, but proprietors were not legally required to make toilets available to all customers. Indeed, when they were available, restrooms for black customers were invariably "around the back" and were not locked, presumably because they were not attended to or cleaned.

Discrimination persisted because gas stations were independently owned, and segregated restrooms were the rule in the South. As one Humble Oil Company official explained in response to a complaint, "We give these dealers advice on many phases of good business practice . . . [but] we are in no position to direct the manner in which these dealers actually conduct their business." When dentist H. Boyd Hall of Corpus Christi, Texas, wrote a letter to Humble Oil in September 1948 complaining that they were "putting up Jim Crow toilets," the oil company official responded with surprise. He claimed that he had received praise from "Negro friends for making modern sanitary rest rooms available for their
use when they travel." He claimed they felt it was a good investment and attracted new customers. The disclaimers of oil companies that they were not responsible may ring hollow to our ears, but in legal terms, they were on firm ground in absolving themselves of the offenses committed by their independent dealers.11

Some black customers were not willing to be humiliated. Jewell Handy Gresham of New York City stopped in January 1960 at a Gulf Station in Macon, Georgia, with her brother, her husband, and their four-year-old daughter. While the car was being filled, as she related, "I took my daughter by the hand and went to the ladies rest room. Finding it locked, I stopped inside the station and asked the attendant for the key. He informed me that the rest room for 'Colored' was in the back. I told him that it was not my custom to use 'back' rest rooms, whereupon he took the key from the wall and turned his back on me." Perhaps because she was with her young daughter, Gresham refused to use the restrooms in the back. By so doing, she asserted her dignity at the expense of personal comfort.

Gresham, a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York, complained in a three-page letter to the public relations officer at Gulf Oil of the "incongruity of denying the normal courtesy facilities which go along with paid patronage." She felt that humanitarian needs of Negro travelers were being ignored. "I cannot tell you what handicaps are endured by Negro motorists traveling through the South—often for long and weary miles—unable to be sure of finding adequate accommodations for taking care of the normal physiological functions of the body and for rest, relaxation, and refreshments."12 Gresham stated what is so clearly implied: that to refuse access to restrooms, or to supply segregated restrooms, was an insult to the humanity of black customers. To deny services to black travelers was to suggest they were not human and did not have the need to deal with bodily functions in privacy.

Traveling families also faced discrimination at restaurants along the road, all over the country. In the late 1940s, blacks who wrote to the NAACP complained of being refused service in the Midwest (Bloomington, Indiana, and Zanesville, Ohio); the West (Reno, Nevada); and the Northeast (Port Jefferson, New York)—all outside the South. Even in 1961, so many black tourists from the South along Route 66 in Illinois were refused restaurant service that they took to bringing their food along and eating in their cars, "rather than chance being embarrassed."13

While African American highway travelers expected to have trouble in the South, they were frequently denied accommodations in the North.
On a bitterly cold night in Cheyenne, Wyoming, in 1949, Reverend Raymond Calhoun, his wife, and their two infant children were denied accommodation at eight different places. The reverend finally approached a state trooper, who told him that if he “was really interested in getting accommodations he would have no trouble across the railroad tracks at the Black and Tan.” Fearful that such accommodations would be second-rate, he did not cross the tracks, but finally his family was taken in by a kind soldier. The president of the Syracuse, New York, branch of the NAACP who wrote the complaint letter stated he was “shocked at this Jim Crowism which took place, not in the deep south, but in the wide open spaces of the West.” In another incident, lawyer Linwood G. Koger Jr. of Baltimore was surprised when his family was denied accommodations at the Bronx Park Motel near New York City in June 1961, especially because they had made reservations not twenty minutes earlier at another hotel on the New England thruway.14

One woman wrote at great length to the NAACP about her experience and claimed rights based on the recent military service of her two brothers, who were traveling with her. In 1945 Mrs. Bessye Brown was traveling from Chicago with her sister and brothers to check on family property in Bloomington, Illinois. They waited 25 minutes at the Woolworth’s lunch counter before the manager told them they would not be served. Brown was incensed by their treatment: “Now mind you both of these boys have seen service. One had on his suit the other his discharge button but even that didn’t phase them.” The brother who had served in England had been in the medical corps, where he “had to minister to white soldiers, his hands probably touching every part of the human body and he comes back to this.” Brown confronted the white manager about their treatment and asked, “Do you mean to tell me colored boys fought so smug people like you are saved and left behind. You probably have a colored cook home stirring up your biscuits with her hands!” Unusually vocal about her opinions, she zeroed in on what she thought made whites uncomfortable about eating with blacks: they might accidentally come into contact, skin to skin, light to dark. The formidable Bessye Brown concluded her letter by stating plainly how she felt: “I was never so humiliated or embarrassed in my life.”15

War veterans thought that they deserved better treatment, given their service to the nation. Sailor Shirley H. Day wrote about an experience on his honeymoon in Nevada, a letter he typed on San Francisco Astoria Hotel stationery. He and his wife stopped at the Victor Coffee Shop on Virginia Street and sat in a booth together. As he wrote, “we was not
thir every long before a waters, come over and said ‘we’re very sorry but we don’t Serve Colerd Peoples.’” Dispirited by the spoiling of his honey-
moon, he marched down to the police station to make a complaint. The
police answered that the city council had written the law that way and
“that was nothing that they could do about it, so I say think.” In an elo-
quent postscript, Day stated that he had been a prisoner of war in Japan
and had been “over there” thirteen months. His brother had been killed
in Nuremberg. He asked, “Why don’t the American Peoples treat us like
deys did when thir was a War going on?” Day could not spell very well,
but he could certainly think, and it did not sit well with him. Why should
he serve his country and not be able to take his bride to lunch? It did not
make sense to him.\textsuperscript{16}

Whether those who wrote to the NAACP were denied the use of rest-
rooms at a gas station, service at a lunch counter, or a place to sleep,
the emotion they most often cited was humiliation. At home they might
know how to avoid places that would treat them that way, but on the road
they were in unfamiliar territory and especially vulnerable to humiliation.
Their treatment was made even more humiliating because it was in front
of their family. Members of their family could see that they were denied the privileges of citizenship, and that they were powerless to obtain their rights. And because they were on vacation and did not want to provoke a confrontation, parents were less likely to insist on fair treatment.

Avoiding Humiliation

Black travelers who were refused service in public accommodations had the option of patronizing black-owned businesses. The rise of black-owned travel businesses was a way to circumvent humiliation, and it recirculated tourist dollars within the black economy. Two travel guides attempted to spare black travelers that humiliation, the Green Book, published from 1936 to 1966, and Travelguide, which began in 1946. New York travel agent Victor Green began the Green Book as a local guide in 1936, and the next year it began national coverage. Green stated that the guide was modeled on Jewish travel guides, and it was for many years the sole travel guide for blacks. Perhaps as a way of deflecting criticism that they might be accommodating Jim Crow, in the introduction to the Green Book editors stated that someday “we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment,” but until then, the guide was published for the reader’s convenience. As the driving force of the Green Book, Green’s motto was, “If Negro-owned business is good, it can be better with advertising.” In the twentieth anniversary edition in 1956, the foreword told readers that the guide “has made traveling more popular, without encountering embarrassing situations.” Their goal was “Assured Protection for the Negro Traveler.”

Guides listed establishments by state and city in four categories: hotels, motels, tourist homes, and restaurants. Arranged by city within the state listing, each line listed the name and address of the business. Businesses paid extra to have their listing in bold print, or to have a star added denoting “recommended.” For example, in 1956 a traveler headed to Arkansas could stay in Camden at Mr. Hugh Hill’s Tourist Home and eat at the Harlem Restaurant in Fordyce. In the city of Hot Springs, a traveler of means would stay at McKenzie’s Motel, “The South’s Finest Motel,” or for more affordable lodgings, one could choose from a list of four tourist homes or apartments. Travelers to Detroit, Michigan, could choose among two dozen hotels, but in Minneapolis, they would only find two hotels and one tourist home. Listings for New York State filled four pages, while New Hampshire had only three establishments that would serve blacks, including the Last Chance Motel in Twin Mountain on U.S. Highway 3.
In the West, travelers would be welcome at only four hotels and the YWCA in Utah, but New Mexico offered over a dozen motels or tourist homes and Aunt Brenda's Restaurant, which catered to black travelers, most along Route 66. Los Angeles boasted the starred Clark Hotel among the dozen hotels listed, along with three tourist homes, five motels, and five restaurants. The same edition’s feature article, “Two Weeks With Pay,” explained that “little racial friction” would be found in New Mexico, but that travelers would be judged on the basis of “cash not color.” In addition to the listings, each edition contained a feature article, such as air travel, foreign travel, or a domestic travel destination, such as Louisville, New York City, or Chicago.

Throughout its run, the Green Book remained a no-frills alphabetical listing handy to have in the glove box. In comparison, Travelguide, founded in 1946 and published through 1955, was a more racially assertive publication with the motto: “Vacation & Recreation without Humiliation.” Edited by W. H. “Billy” Butler, Travelguide relied on advertising by its major sponsor, Blatz Brewing of Milwaukee, to pay the high production costs. Each edition sported a cover photo of attractive, well-dressed women in scenic vacation spots and featured full-page ads for Schenley whiskey and Philip Morris cigarettes. The Pittsburgh Courier and black radio stations advertised in its pages, as did prosperous businesses, like Roy Campanella Wines and Liquors, the Savoy Ballroom, Beulah Bullock’s convertible traveling fashions, and Rose Meta’s House of Beauty, all in New York City.

More than just “a directory of accommodations unrestricted as regards race,” Travelguide listed civil rights laws for each state and the addresses of the NAACP headquarters in each city. Every edition carried advertisements for the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the United Negro College Fund. In a feature called “Travelguide Salutes!” the guide published short biographies and photos of prominent black citizens like statesman Ralph Bunche, baseball star Roy Campanella, radio broadcaster Barry Gray, or theater director Margaret Webster. Heroes to the race, and exemplars of the American values of equality and fairness, the people highlighted in the pages of Travelguide reminded readers that they should take an active role in fighting racial discrimination.

Black-owned travel agencies attempted to prevent the embarrassment black travelers encountered when reservations made through white agencies were not honored. In the summer of 1950 Miss Barbara Simmons made reservations to attend the Tanglewood Music Festival in Massachusetts. She and her group of friends arranged their hotel reservations
through Ambassador Travel Agency of New York, but when she arrived and "it became obvious she was a Negro," the Festival House refused to accommodate her, and she had to stay in a rooming house "clearly for Negroes." When Simmons later lodged a complaint to the New York travel agent, he was "exceptionally abusive and unpleasant."  

To spare travelers embarrassment like that suffered by Barbara Simmons, in the mid-1950s, Admiral Tours and King Travel catered to the growing black travel market, and black travel guides operated their own travel referral agencies. More commonly African American travelers sought the services of a travel agent for foreign travel. Educators and black professionals favored affordable Bermuda and Mexico; they traveled there to avoid the segregation that they had encountered in the United States. Edwin B. Henderson, director of the Washington, D.C., schools' department of health for black students, promoted Mexico in an article in *Afro* magazine in April 1955. Noting the absence of racial discrimination, he stated: "During my recent trip there, for the first time in my life on the continent, I felt like a first-class American citizen." He argued, "colored Americans will find in Mexico more of beauty, culture, and friendliness than Miami or our Southern-most beaches will afford, even if or when vestiges of Jim Crow have disappeared." Henderson enjoyed traveling there because "you don't have to fear a barber's chair, or a 'no accommodations' stare by a hotel clerk in Mexico." Ironically, to feel like a citizen, Henderson had to leave his country.

**White Resistance**

The letters of complaint to the NAACP were eloquent expressions of the humiliation felt by travelers who were turned away while traveling with their families. By writing a letter of protest, they were making claims to rights of public accommodation that they thought were due them as citizens of the United States. Those who denied them those rights argued that the rights of property ownership allowed them to choose their customers. Whites stayed in motels and ate at restaurants whose management turned away persons who were not white. A segregated travel infrastructure meant that whites would not have to sleep on the same sheets, swim in the same pools, or sit their bare bottoms on the same toilet seats as black travelers. Outside the South, most whites were probably oblivious to the fact that they were traveling within racially segregated spaces because whiteness stood as the norm. Yet evidence suggests that many white travelers chose to look the other way when they stayed in motels or ate at restaurants that would not serve black fellow travelers.
Cultural clues suggest that whites found the plight of black travelers comical, a funny joke. In 1953 an episode of the *Amos 'n' Andy Show* opened with a scene of Sapphire and her mother at the kitchen table making vacation plans with $400 from Sapphire's parents. At first they thought of Maine, where they could go "swimming, camping, [and] square dancing." Sapphire says, "I'm so excited I can smell the Maine pine trees." But unbeknownst to Sapphire, her husband, Kingfisher, has been withdrawing from their savings, and the $400 is gone. He and his pal Amos, the taxicab driver, talk it over, and decide he should sell his car to replace the money. He arrives home with the $400 just as the women have arranged to buy a travel trailer with the $400. They justify their purchase as a way to "stay away twice as long and see twice as much." Kingfisher attempts to earn back the money by charging a friend for taking him on a fishing vacation (actually Central Park), but when Sapphire and her mother discover his deception, they chase him out of the park.23

While whites may have found the situation laughable, any black viewer would have recognized that a trailer was a good solution to the problem of finding places to stay in the Jim Crow era. Despite the distasteful way in which the sitcom portrayed blacks (leading the NAACP to ask Blatz Brewing to cancel their sponsorship in 1953), the television show made light of a tragic truth. In 1953 blacks were not free to travel about the country because they were frequently denied lodging and refused service at restaurants. Maine, where Sapphire wanted to go, was an especially hostile place for travelers of color. Kingfisher's bumbling of the responsibility of the family vacation was just another reminder to white viewers that blacks neglected the family responsibilities held up as a national ideal in the 1950s.24

To understand the views of whites upholding Jim Crow, we can turn to arguments made to maintain racial segregation in the civil rights legislation of 1964. Although we do not have direct testimony from white travelers, we do have testimony by those who owned the establishments where they stayed. The owners' arguments were the other side of the coin of citizen consumers: they argued that owning property gave them the right to decide who should be their customers. And, they argued, if they admitted blacks, whites would stay away and their business would be ruined. Underlying their argument was an argument of fear, because they believed that white customers would stay away because they feared bodily contact with black customers.

Samuel J. Setta of Easton, Maryland, owned a mom-and-pop motel, typical, he said, of 85 percent of the motels in the nation. He opposed the
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r, because they ey feared bodily and-pop motel, He opposed the civil rights bill “because it is aimed at businesses which are strictly private enterprise.” Because “the customer is the boss,” he saw his job as meeting their needs. “In my motel if my customers want TV, I provide TV. If my customers want room phones, I provide room phones. And if they pre-
fer a segregated motel, I provide a segregated motel.” He denied that he rejected a black customer “because of his color.” He argued instead that “the Negro is rejected because he is an economic liability to our business.” He buttressed his economic arguments with potent racism, arguing that segregation was “the law of nature.” When Setta said that blacks were more likely to be diseased than whites, Senator Munrooney pointed out that most of the fine dining establishments in the South relied on black cooks and servers. Upon further questioning about the inconsistency of hiring blacks but not allowing them to be customers, Setta admitted that all of his employees were African American. But he defended his logic of segregation by saying, “In my motel it is a lot more intimate for a man to jump in bed with his clothes off and sleep in it than it is for that maid to pick up those sheets and lay them on there.” Setta argued that the fear of bodily contact, of whites touching the same sheets blacks had slept in, even though laundered, was a rationale for him to exclude blacks as customers.25

The same rationale, that fear of contact with blacks would scare away whites, was used by Edgar S. Kalb, manager of the Beverly Beach Club in Mayo, Maryland. He contended that segregated private beaches should be available to “persons who do not desire to bathe with the persons who patronize these public beaches.” Senator Strom Thurmond probed further in his questioning by asking, “You feel this would hurt your business if this bill passes?” Kalb answered bluntly: “Senator, this wouldn’t hurt my business; this would destroy my business.” Because the private beach served a community of adjacent privately owned beach cottages, desegregation, he argued, “would be a rape of those communities, in plain language.” The use of the sexual metaphor of rape appears deliberately calculated to conjure up the image of the black male preying on white “female” communities. His language insinuated the sexual politics that spawned and sustained the culture of segregation since Reconstruction.26

The conversation that followed made it plain that fear of the sexuality of black men was at the core of the custom of segregated beaches. Senator Hart asked if Kalb, who employed thirty-five to forty blacks, “would not object to swimming with them.” Kalb replied, “Yes, sir; and I wouldn’t want my wife to swim with them, and I wouldn’t want my daughter-in-law to swim with them; no sir, under no condition.” Kalb makes clear
here his patriarchal duty to protect the women in his family from any possible contact with black men in the water. To Kalb, white women and black men in the same body of water was “just taboo, and it is taboo to the average white person I come into contact with.” Because he feared breaking the taboo would cost him his white customers, Kalb thought that ending segregation would destroy his business.27

The hotel manager in Florida who turned away Ralph Sims and his family in 1955, forcing them to sleep in their car, cited the same fear as underlying his decision. The white manager, who was from Chicago, admitted he felt sorry for the Sims family but that he turned them away because if they were seen, it would disturb the regular customers. “I would kiss away a thousand dollars a year right there,” he said. He continued, “And then just suppose they had wanted to use the pool this morning.”28

As swimming pools became a standard feature of roadside motels, the problem of race in motels was exacerbated, hardening the boundaries of segregation in accommodations. Owners of motels and beaches feared they would lose their white customers, who they believed would not swim in the same pools or sleep between the same sheets as black customers. While whites traveled freely and stayed where they could afford to, black
The family of Dr. John O. Brown swimming at one of the few black-owned motels with a pool in Florida, 1959. (Frank Bauman, photographer, LOOK Magazine Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division.)
families like the Sims either spent the night in their cars or stayed in the “black and tan” part of town at possibly inferior lodgings listed in the travel guides.

**Challenging Jim Crow**

The barriers of the segregation in public accommodations began to erode in the early 1960s. Within the black community, the question was, were the travel guides resisting or accommodating to Jim Crow? A rising middle class of African American professionals and educators protested that they would be accommodating Jim Crow by staying only in black-owned businesses. As early as 1953, NAACP public relations director Henry Lee Moon cautiously responded to a sample booklet for black travelers sent to him by a public relations firm “serving the Negro market.” Moon thought that some would be happy to have it, but others “will look upon it as an attempt to steer them into Jim Crow quarters and, accordingly, might resent it.” Second, prosperous blacks felt such hotels to be second-rate, and wanted to stay in the higher-quality white-owned lodging. Many of the black-owned hotels were members of the Nationwide Hotel Association, a “great Negro Hotel” association, but many of its properties were at best second-rate. By the mid-1950s it suggested its members raise standards by modernizing their properties. In 1961 the *Green Book* urged black-owned businesses to raise their standards because today’s traveler “is no longer content to pay top prices for inferior accommodations and services.” Black travelers who could afford it preferred to stay in an integrated lodging establishment like the new interstate motels rather than detour to a black-owned motel in a remote highway location.30

The growth of the civil rights movement sharpened the rhetoric of rights in travel guides that catered to African Americans. The 1963 *Green Book* opened with an article called “Your Rights, Briefly Speaking!” that listed states that had salutary civil rights policies and where victims of discrimination could apply for redress. The article sent a clear message to readers that “the Negro is only demanding what everyone else wants . . . what is guaranteed all citizens by the Constitution of the United States.” The *Green Book* acknowledged publicly that protests and demonstrations have “widened the areas of public accommodations accessible to all,” but they created the listings because they realized “that a family planning a vacation hopes for one that is free of tensions and problems.” The inside back page of the *Green Book* advertised Langston Hughes’s history of the
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NAACP, *Fight for Freedom*, a sign of a rising consciousness that would
soon put the *Green Book* out of business.21

Responses to discrimination in business travel set the stage for broad-
ening the battle to pleasure travel on the road. The NAACP had long
brought incidents of discrimination to the attention of the parent com-
panies of hotels, restaurants, and gas stations. Business travelers had always
been quick to contact their local chapter of the NAACP in hopes that
legal action would be taken. In the late 1940s these practices were brought
to the attention of Thurgood Marshall, special counsel to the NAACP,
who notified the offending hotels that they were in violation of state law
and that he would ask the district attorney’s office to intercede with the
Hotelmens’s Association. After a 1947 embarrassment when Negro dele-
gates to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organ-
ization brought suit against a Denver, Colorado, hotel for denying them
accommodations, the NAACP became proactive in checking out hotel
procedures before conferences. During the 1950s professional and scient-
ific organizations that had black members began to carefully investigate
hotel practices and refused to schedule meetings at hotels that discrimi-
nated against their colored guests. By late in the decade, larger hotels
in northeastern cities had open-occupancy policies, largely as a result of
pressure put on hotel and motel chains by black travelers.22

As more black travelers refused to accommodate Jim Crow, the
NAACP pursued a strategy of putting pressure on two national restaur-
ant and hotel chains, Howard Johnson’s and Hilton Hotels. Because
they were a large and well-recognized chain, Howard Johnson restaur-
ants made a suitable target. The NAACP had documented a consistent
pattern of discrimination at Howard Johnson restaurants, and Thurgood
Marshall had extracted an apology from the chain regarding an incident
in 1947. In 1947 Marshall was refused service at the same Elizabeth, New
Jersey, restaurant (certainly not a coincidental choice), and he lost pa-
tience with corporate executives’ promises. In a letter to the company,
he demanded that they not “tolerate this asinine effort to circumvent
the policy of Howard Johnson’s Restaurants, as well as the Civil Rights
Law of the State of New Jersey.” Unsatisfied with a reply from corporate
headquarters denying that they were affiliated with the restaurant, Mar-
shall and his traveling companion, Andrew Weinberger, sued for $500 in
damages.23

As one would expect of an ice cream shop, children were involved in
incidents at Howard Johnson restaurants. In August 1947 James Clair
Taylor of Paterson, New Jersey, and his eight-year-old son visited the Howard Johnson restaurant on the highway near Wilmington, Delaware. While Taylor was standing at the urinal in the restroom, a man interrupted him to tell him the restroom was for “white people.” He replied the sign on the door read “Gentlemen,” calmly washed his hands, and went back upstairs to pick up his order of sandwiches and ice cream.34

The problems at Howard Johnson persisted. In 1960 F. Weldon Younger and his wife were vacationing when they were refused service at the Howard Johnson café in Hagerstown, Maryland. According to his letter summarizing the incident, they waited a long time to be served and were glared at by the head waitress. Finally “a Negro wearing a white cap and an apron . . . stopped at our table and said, ‘We can not serve you.’” Younger recalled:

My polite assertions that we were very hungry; that we were U.S. citizens; strangers in the vicinity; that we had a Diner’s club card; we were able to pay; we had Standard Oil and Texaco credit cards; are members of AAA, and they recommended Howard Johnson cafes to us; that it was undemocratic, unchristian and inhuman to turn us away hungry—all of this brought firm and positive answers that we or no other colored people would be served in this Howard Johnson café.

He would have expected discrimination “in the deep south,” but not “eight miles south of the Pennsylvania border and about fifty two miles northwest of Washington, D.C., our national capital.”35 In his complaint he was asserting his rights as a citizen consumer, arguing that he should be served in a place where he could afford to pay the bill. In essence, he was claiming rights due to him as a credit-card-carrying member of the American middle class.

In an atmosphere of rising racial tensions provoked by the 1961 summer Freedom Rides, CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) undertook a campaign in 1962 to integrate roadside eateries, primarily targeting Howard Johnson. CORE’s press release calling for volunteers boasted, “Last year we virtually ran Jim Crow out of the bus terminals. He still lurks on the highways of America and raises the ‘whites only’ signs too often when the Negro traveler stops at a Howard Johnson restaurant—and others in the South.” Perhaps in response to the proposed sit-ins, Howard Johnson restaurants in Florida desegregated and were “tested” in major cities by CORE and NAACP volunteers.36

CORE was also involved in putting pressure on local hotels. In 1962 Hotel Monthly warned its readers that they could expect action if they
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discriminated against black guests. When famed jazz trumpeter Dizzy
Gillespie was denied admission to the pool at a hotel in downtown Kansas
City, he filed a complaint with CORE, which resulted in negative publicity
for the hotel "from coast to coast." The author of the \textit{Hotel Monthly}
article suggests that the organizations were emboldened by court rulings
against school segregation and warned hotel owners that these groups are
"staffed with professionals, amply financed and in possession of both
the machinery and power to force an issue in public." CORE chapters in
Nashville, Atlanta, Richmond, Louisville, and New Orleans (whose
hotels did not accept blacks as guests) planned protests to target these
hotels. CORE leader William Larkin listed common arguments made by
hotels to support their policies of racial exclusion but countered that "the
quality of their clientele will not drop just because they remove the color
barrier," because only blacks who can afford that hotel will patronize it.
CORE battled discrimination by urging convention groups to boycott
hotels that discriminated on the basis of race. Yet the economic pressure
did not always result in hotels dropping the color barrier.\textsuperscript{37}

The NAACP targeted Hilton Hotels when at the July 1962 NAACP
conference in Atlanta, delegates from New York's welfare department
were refused hotel accommodations they had reserved long in advance.
On the spot the NAACP authorized an emergency resolution authoriz-
picketing of Atlanta hotels, and nearly one-third of the 1,237 delegates
circled sixteen Atlanta hotels with picket lines. Their swift response re-
sulted from advance planning of the conference as a test case of the hotel's
policy in Atlanta, but they were unsuccessful in desegregating Atlanta's
major hotels.\textsuperscript{38}

When the delegates returned home, the New York State conference
of the NAACP directed their ninety-five branches to "withhold patron-
age" from any of the Hilton hotels, and Robert L. Carter of the national
NAACP and his staff assisted in filing complaints with the New York
State Commission for Human Rights. Meetings were held between
Hilton vice president Frank G. Wangeman and commission chairman
George Fowler, and Hilton publicly issued a letter to Governor Nelson
A. Rockefeller stating their policy: "to welcome all persons as its guests
regardless of race, color or creed." Hilton admitted that two hotels were
exceptions: New Orleans, where the state of Louisiana required segrega-
tion, and Atlanta, "where local custom has thus far prevented us from
fulfilling our wish to accommodate Negro guests." The statement also
protested the NAACP's actions by stating, "it seems scarcely fair to penal-
ize the great majority of our properties whose record of observing human
rights cannot be questioned." As a result of the complaint, Hilton was to show efforts to alleviate the situation during the month of October. On November 1 Hilton management reported to the commissioner that they had reiterated their policy of nondiscrimination to their hotels, and that they had directed the Atlanta staff "to convince the hotel interests of that city that their local custom is contrary to today's philosophies on human rights."39

Privately, Hilton Hotel personnel were not so willing to be made a target of boycotts. Clyde J. Harris, director of catering at the Waldorf-Astoria (a Hilton property) wrote to Kivie Kaplan, of Colonial Tanning Company and a member of the national NAACP board, to protest the boycott. He asserted that "we, in the Hilton Organization, probably engage more personalities such as Lena Horne, Duke Ellington, etc., than any other Hotel Organization in the Country." He thought it unfair that they would be singled out, especially because twenty-one other Atlanta hotels discriminated on the basis of race. Indeed, the NAACP had in its files a letter sent to all prospective guests by the Heart of Atlanta Motel explaining that they had a policy of not accepting Negro guests and had no intention of doing so in the future. But the Heart of Atlanta was not a national chain, so it was not as vulnerable to the economic pressure put on Hilton Hotels. By spring 1963, after a report from a NAACP member that her reservations at the Hilton Inn in Atlanta were honored, the NAACP issued a press release stating that the hotel was now accepting "Negro guests." And on May 18, the press release stated, the federal district court in New Orleans had ruled the Louisiana state law directing segregation in hotels to be unconstitutional.40

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

In the campaign to desegregate the nation's restaurants and lodging industries, organizations like the NAACP and CORE depended on their members to test the boundaries of Jim Crow. Without the carefully worded letters of civil rights activists, the NAACP would not have known what restaurants and hotels to target. The vehemence of the letters and the refusal of the writers to be humiliated, especially in front of their children, was powerful testimony of the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in travel that persisted long after the end of World War II. Not until black citizens and the NAACP put economic pressure on the larger corporate travel industry was action taken to assure them of their rights to a roadside meal and a good night's rest. But such actions, targeted at the national chains, were not enough to desegregate the many mom-and-
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pop motels and roadside eateries that routinely refused black guests. Roy Wilkins made exactly this point in the hearings for the civil rights bill: “The proprietors of small establishments, including tourist homes and gasoline filling stations, are no less obligated to render nondiscriminatory public service than are the proprietors of huge emporiums or hosttelries.” Nor were the organization’s tactics successful at desegregating hotels and restaurants in major Southern cities like Atlanta. Local efforts had failed; a federal law was required.

Months of tense and violent confrontations between civil rights ac- tivists and white segregationists in Alabama led up to President Ken- nedy’s long-awaited call for civil rights legislation in June 1963. After Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson boldly took steps to use his clout to get a bill passed. As a long-time senator from Texas who was against segregation, he had tried since 1957 to get civil rights legislation passed in Congress. Johnson’s fight against segregation dated from an epiphany he had in the early 1950s in a conver- sation with Gene Williams, the husband of the Johnson’s maid, Helen Williams. Each year, Senator and Mrs. Johnson would fly to Washington, D.C., for the congressional session, and at its end, they would fly back. The Williams and the Johnson’s cook, Zephyr Williams, would drive. One year, Johnson asked whether the Williams could take his beagle in the car with them. Gene hemmed and hawed and said he would rather not. Johnson asked why, and Gene admitted that it was a difficult trip from Washington to Texas. As Johnson recalled in his memoirs, Gene said:

We drive for hours and hours. We get hungry. But there’s no place on the road we can stop and go in and eat. We drive some more. It gets pretty hot. We want to wash up. But the only bathroom we’re allowed in is usually miles off the main highway. We keep goin’ til night comes—til we get so tired we can’t stay awake anymore. We’re ready to pull in. But it takes another hour or so to find a place to sleep. You see, what I’m saying is that a colored man’s got enough trouble getting across the South on his own, without having a dog along.

Johnson said he had an awakening, that he realized for the first time the difficulties blacks faced in simple things, like finding a bathroom, a place to eat, or a place to sleep on the 1,300-mile trip from Texas to Washing- ton, D.C. Johnson said, “That day I first realized the sad truth: that to the extent Negroes were imprisoned, so was I.” Johnson told that story again and again to powerful men in the South to make his point, and he used
the power of his presidential administration to fight for equal rights for African Americans. In the end, it was the president's family experience that tipped the balance toward enacting federal legislation.

Members of Johnson's administration carefully prepared their testimony in the hearing on the bill. They made their case on the grounds that segregated facilities disrupted trade, rather than on grounds that black travelers needed to be protected. Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz focused his argument on how segregation was bad for the economy, but he too played on the theme of the black traveler. "If Negroes felt as free to travel and explore this country as white families of similar income, the economic stimulus would be very large indeed in the transportation, apparel, travel goods, sports, gifts, and camping goods industries, and in the full range of service industries—hotels, motels, and eating and drinking establishments." Beyond the economic multiplier effect, he commented on the dispiriting impact of segregation on black children. "I think there is no strain at all in relating to the fact that a child, a Negro child, will walk past a hotel or restaurant where he can't enter on his way to school, and he will enter the door of that school wondering whether it is worth spending the day working very hard."

The image of the black family on the road trying to find a motel or a place to eat was at the center of the case made to the committee. The testimony of Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr., undersecretary of commerce, was based on extensive studies of the availability of accommodations for black cross-country travelers. He used the listings of accommodations in a black travel guide to predict that black travelers "would have an extremely slender choice in attempting to find overnight accommodations" at integrated hotels and motels along the route. He figured that the average distance a "middle class Negro family" would have to travel to find a place to stay was 141 miles on the route from Washington to Miami, and 174 miles on the route to New Orleans. His statistics, although only estimates, demonstrated "the tremendous problem faced by Negro travelers along the highways in the South." He cited statistics showing that blacks in Northern cities spent more on automobile operation, suggesting that blacks were traveling less and that "the absence of suitable facilities along our important national highways must be the discouraging factor." Both arguments, the economic costs of Jim Crow, and the deprivations of the middle-class family with children, were linked in government testimony in favor of the bill.

Ultimately the testimony was successful in convincing lawmakers of the need for federal intervention, and President Johnson signed the Civil
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Rights Act in July 1964. It did not ensure equality, of course, but it made
discrimination illegal, and it provided citizens a tool to challenge discrimi-
nation. 46 The significance of the 1964 Civil Rights Act cannot be under-
estimated; although civil rights advocates had been successful in using
the courts to fight Jim Crow on a case-by-case basis, and although some
states enacted laws outlawing segregation in public accommodations, the
act was the first congressional legislation to make discrimination in public
accommodations throughout the nation illegal.

Traveling African Americans faced humiliation while simply trying to
find a place to eat, to stop for the night, and to use the toilet. The growth
of a separate travel industry that catered to black customers allowed black
families to circumvent humiliation, but ultimately they fought to shed
their second-class status as citizens. A rising black middle class that was
prosperous and educated demanded rights equal to those held by white
travelers. Many of them were veterans of World War II, and they de-
manded the same freedoms they had fought for in the war. They refused
to settle for inferior accommodations on the wrong side of the tracks;
they demanded their full rights as consumer citizens. Their fight for full
citizenship while on the road led to a broader victory against discrimina-
tion against women and the disabled, who would ground their demands
for equal treatment in the provisions of the same civil rights legislation
that made it possible for African American families to vacation without
humiliation.