

**Lesson Title:** Driving While Black Lesson Plan**Time:** 90 minutes**Materials/Resources:**

- Driving While Black documentary. Make sure the link works before class.  
<https://www.pbs.org/video/driving-while-black-race-space-and-mobility-in-america-achvfr/>
- The documentary is 1h 55m 23s – We are cutting it to 1 hour.
- Worksheet with questions to fill out and discuss throughout the documentary.
- Pictures in folder that localize the presentation. Local Ford Manufacturing Plant at 16<sup>th</sup> and Cuming Streets. Preston Love Jr.'s traveling photos.

**Introduction:**

The documentary we are going to watch today is based on historian Gretchen Sorin's book, *Driving While Black*. In it we'll discover how the advent of the automobile brought new mobility and freedom for African Americans but also exposed them to discrimination and how travel guides, like the Green Book, presented a modern-day Underground Railroad to show Black travelers which hotels and restaurants would serve them and help them travel safely.

We will watch the presentation in segments and review and answer questions after each segment. (Pass out worksheet).

**Learning Tasks:**

The documentary is broken into four segments. After each segment teachers will lead students in discussions about what they have just learned. Students should take notes in their worksheet as they watch the film.

**Segment 1 – 30:19 to 44:54**

**Themes:** The Great Migration; Mass Production of Automobile; Black Middle Class and Purchasing of Automobiles; Hitting the Open Road.

**Notes:** For discussion show pictures of Omaha's Ford Manufacturing Plant at 16<sup>th</sup> and Cuming Streets. Still standing today known as the Tip Top building. Opened in 1916 employing 350 to 400 people earning \$5 a day or \$139 in today's dollars. Assembly workers produced 75 cars a day that were transported by train

throughout the country. Note African American employee in The Durham's picture of the parts counter.

Omaha's Black population in 1900 was 4,046. In 1930, 11,166 and in 1970, 34,722. In 2020, 57,833.



(Photos from the Nebraska Forensic collection owned by KHS&M and on permanent loan to Western Heritage Museum.)  
ARCHITECT ALBERT KAHN DESIGNED THE FORD MOTOR CO. BUILDING (SHOWN HERE IN 1930) AT A COST OF \$310,000. KAHN WAS INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN FOR HIS INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURE. HE ALSO DESIGNED THE BRANDEIS MANSION AT 500 SO. 38th STREET.



LOUIS PRUSHA (IN WHITE SHIRT) WAS THE FOREMAN FOR THE ASSEMBLY LINE OPERATION AT THE FORD MOTOR CO. PLANT WHEN THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN IN 1925. WHEN THE ASSEMBLY PLANT OPENED IN 1916, 350 TO 400 SKILLED MECHANICS AND OTHER EMPLOYEES TURNED OUT 75 FINISHED CARS PER DAY. FORD SHIPPED PARTS TO THE PLANT, WHERE WORKERS WERE PAID \$5 A DAY TO ASSEMBLE THE VEHICLES.



### Discussion Questions

1. Why did Black people want to leave the South? (Better jobs and educational opportunities. Escape Racial Violence. Freedom from Jim Crow laws)
2. What brought African Americans from the south to Detroit? (Good jobs in automotive industry)
3. Southern African Americans also migrated to Omaha. What industries drew Black southerners to Omaha? (Railroads and Packing Houses)
4. What happened with the 1896 Plessy vs Ferguson decision? (Created "separate but equal" public facilities and legal protection under the law)
5. What did the automobile provide for Black people? (Freedom. Status Symbol. Way of getting out of segregated bus and train travel)



## **Segment 2 – 44:54 to 54:00**

**Themes:** How travel was different for Black people.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How was the Black and White travel experience different?
2. How did Black people plan for travel? What precautions did they take?  
(Traveled at night. Brought their own food. Slept in their cars. Went to the bathroom on the side of the road.)
3. The film touches on Sundown towns. What were they? (All-White towns where Black people had to be out of the town by 6 p.m. or risk the chance of being jailed, beaten or worse).

## **Segment 3 – 54:00 to 1:12:26**

**Themes:** Green Book. Esso Standard Oil. Chitlin' Circuit. Black Entrepreneurship.

**Notes:** 28 Omaha Green Book sites in 1947. Mix of restaurants, tourist homes, taverns, drug stores, service stations and a tailor. Majority owned by Black entrepreneurs although some were owned by Jewish men and a couple by Czech immigrants. Might be a good place to show Preston Love Jr.'s photos of his families travel to Los Angeles where his dad, jazz musician Preston Love, performed. Might also highlight the MIHV North 24<sup>th</sup> Street mapping project

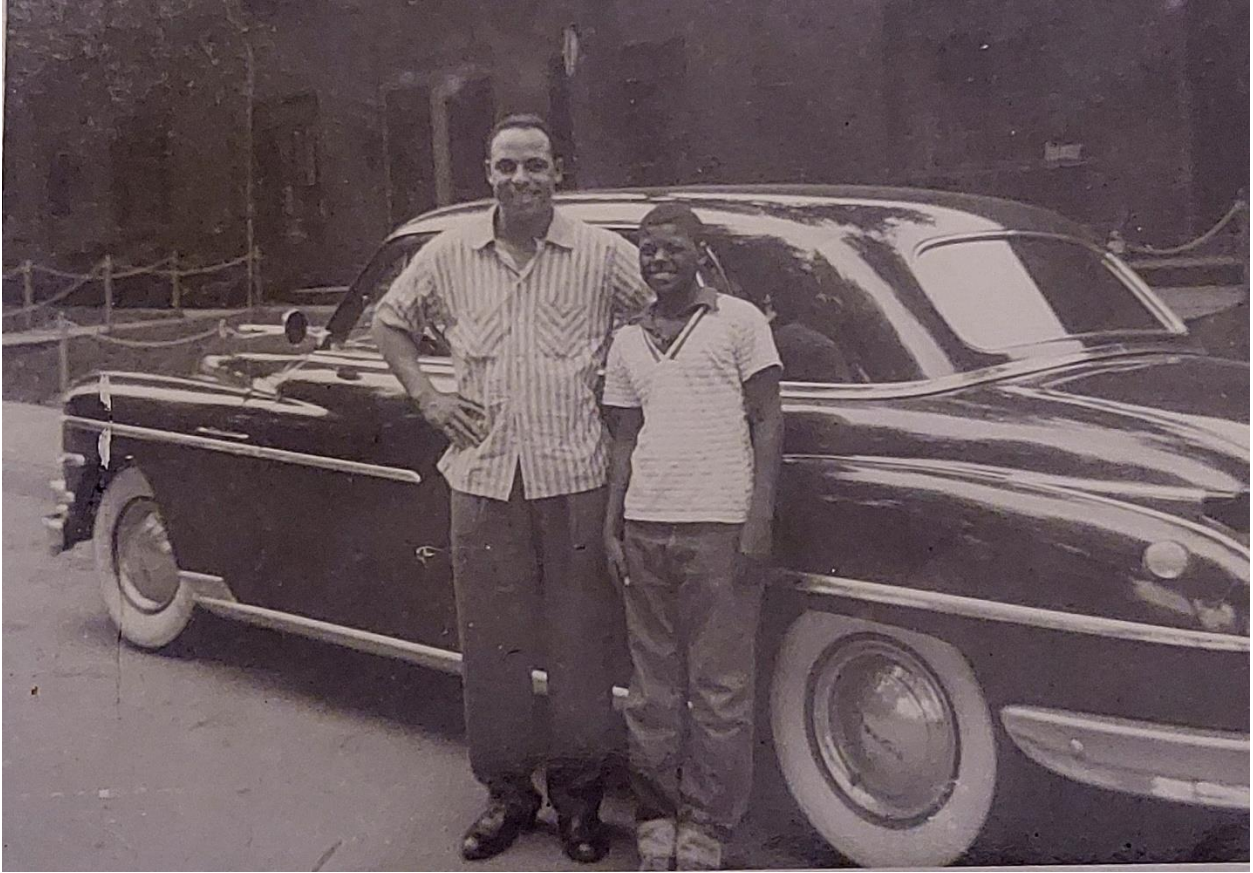
<https://www.ops.org/Page/6274>

highlighting 494 properties on North 24<sup>th</sup> Street in 1958 all open to African Americans.



Preston, Betty, and Preston, Jr., in Santa Monica, California, 1952.





### Discussion Questions

1. Why was a travel guide for Black people needed? (Did not always have contacts in every city you wanted to travel in to tell you where you get eat, stay, and get gas)
2. What were the types of businesses listed in the Green Book?
3. What was ESSO-Standard Oil's role in the Green Book? (Advertiser. Distributed the Green Book at their service stations. Employed Black people.)
4. The film mentions the Chitlin' Circuit. What was it? (Places where African American musicians could perform.) In Omaha places might be Dreamland Ballroom, Carnation Ballroom and Allen's Showcase.
5. Black people created businesses to serve fellow Black people. In Omaha that included funeral homes, theaters, swimming pools, hotels, and restaurants. In 1958, there were 494 properties that catered to Black people along North 24<sup>th</sup> Street.

#### **Segment 4 – 1:12:26 to 1:31:40 end**

**Themes:** New highway system and how highways destroyed Black neighborhoods. Slum Clearance. Civil Rights law signed in 1964 that ends segregation and how it affects Black businesses. Sharing the History of the Black community lost.

**Notes:** In less than a decade after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, at least half of the Green Book's Black-owned businesses were closed. Through government programs like "urban renewal," in which Black communities were disproportionately disrupted and destroyed, the entrepreneurial hopes of many Black citizens were dashed. As public space became less divided, Black businesses had to compete with larger, well-funded white-owned businesses that had the favor of police, policy makers, and politicians. This reality left Black-owned business with few resources and little leverage.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. How did Interstate Highways change the travel for Black people? (Made it safer.)
2. What Highway broke up Omaha's predominantly African American neighborhood? (Highway 75 North)
3. How did the creation of Interstate highways hurt predominantly non-White neighborhoods?
4. How important was the car during the Civil Rights Movement? (Allowed people to meet and gather quickly and if things went bad, they could get away quickly.)
5. What happened to many African American businesses after the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed? (Now that Black people could eat and shop in White-owned businesses they did, and Black-owned business suffered. Interstates, slum clearance, urban renewal and in Omaha, riots, also affected Black-owned businesses).
6. Why is it important we document Omaha's Green Book sites?

#### **Reflection Questions (Could be Homework)**

1. How did Driving While Black's outline of American history line up with what you already knew?
2. What information was new and/or surprising to you?



**Lesson Title:** Driving While Black PBS Documentary

<https://www.pbs.org/video/driving-while-black-race-space-and-mobility-in-america-achvfr/>

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials Needed:**

Pen/Pencil

**Segment 1 – 30:19 to 44:54**

**Themes:** The Great Migration; Mass Production of Automobile; Black Middle Class and Purchasing of Automobiles; Hitting the Open Road.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Why did Black people want to leave the South?
2. What brought African Americans from the south to Detroit?
3. Southern African Americans also migrated to Omaha. What industries drew Black southerners to Omaha?
4. What happened with the 1896 Plessy vs Ferguson decision?
5. What did the automobile provide for Black people?

**Segment 2 – 44:54 to 54:00**

**Themes:** How travel was different for Black people.

**Discussion Questions**

1. How was the Black and White travel experience different?
2. How did Black people plan for travel? What precautions did they take?
3. The film touches on Sundown towns. What were they?

### **Segment 3 – 54:00 to 1:12:26**

**Themes:** Green Book. Esso Standard Oil. Chitlin' Circuit. Black Entrepreneurship.

**Notes:** MIHV North 24<sup>th</sup> Street mapping project <https://www.ops.org/Page/6274>

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why was a travel guide for Black people needed?
2. What were the types of businesses listed in the Green Book?
3. What was ESSO-Standard Oil's role in the Green Book?
4. The film mentions the Chitlin' Circuit. What was it?
5. Black people created businesses to serve fellow Black people. In Omaha that included funeral homes, theaters, swimming pools, hotels, and restaurants. In 1958, there were 494 properties that catered to Black people along North 24<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **Segment 4 – 1:12:26 to 1:31:40 end**

**Themes:** New highway system and how highways destroyed Black neighborhoods. Slum Clearance. Civil Rights law signed in 1964 that ends segregation and how it affects Black businesses. Sharing the History of the Black community lost.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. How did Interstate Highways change the travel for Blacks?
2. What Highway broke up Omaha's predominantly African American neighborhood?
3. How did the creation of Interstate highways hurt non-white neighborhoods?
4. How important was the car during the Civil Rights Movement?
5. What happened to many African American businesses after the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed?

6. Why is it important we document Omaha's Green Book sites?

**Reflection Questions**

1. How did Driving While Black's outline of American history line up with what you already knew?
2. Did any of it surprise you?