

Black Lives, Green Books, and Blue Checks: Comparing the Content of the Negro Motorist Green Book to the Content on Black Twitter

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The Negro Motorist Green Book was a publication that offered resources for the Black traveler from 1936 to 1966. More than a directory of Black-friendly businesses, it also offered articles that provided insights for how best to travel safely, engagement with readers through contests and invitations for readers to share travel stories, and even civil rights advocacy. Today, a contemporary counterpart to the *Green Book* is Black Twitter, where people share information and advocate for their community. By conducting qualitative open coding on a subset of *Green Book* editions as well as tweets from Black Twitter, we explore similarities and overlapping characteristics such as safety, information sharing, and social justice. Where they diverge exposes how spaces like Black Twitter have evolved to accommodate the needs of people in the Black diaspora beyond the scope of physical travel and into digital spaces. Our research points to ways that the Black community has shifted from the physical to the digital space, expanding how it supports itself, and the potential for research to strengthen throughlines between the past and the present in order to better see the possibilities of the future.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**; **Computer supported cooperative work**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Twitter, Online Communities, Racism, Black Communities, Black Twitter

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1 INTRODUCTION

Building a bridge from our past to our present helps connect us to who we were and gives us a deeper understanding of who we are today as well as a vision of who we may become. For example, in Virginia Eubanks' book *Automating Inequality*, she draws parallels between the poorhouses of the 19th century and the digital poorhouses created today with algorithms [22]. Inspired by this work, we draw a parallel between *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (hereinafter the *Green Book*) and

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its modern contemporary, Black Twitter. The *Green Book* is a historical document that contained a directory of businesses Black travelers could safely patronize along with articles about traveling, cars/car maintenance, and Civil Rights. Black Twitter is a space on Twitter in which Black people, onlookers, and outsiders gather around Black oral traditions and conversations ranging from entertainment to activism.

Hiding in plain sight, both the *Green Book* and Black Twitter operate(d) with a clear service for Black people. While the former was a collection of information focused on helping the Black traveler find safe and comfortable accommodations, the latter serves to digitally connect Black people on Twitter across experiences, including around safety and activism. As part of a larger research project to explore this space that also includes interviews with people who consider themselves part of Black Twitter [47], we sought to expressly compare and contrast the *content* of Black Twitter and the *Green Book*. With this goal in mind, this research study addresses these questions: (1) In what ways is Black Twitter a mechanism (dis)similar to the *Green Book*? (2) How do the modern day themes of Black Twitter connect to the content of the *Green Book*?

Following content analysis of digital copies of the *Green Book* and a sample of tweets from Black Twitter, we describe similarities between this artifact of the past and a community of the present, in both content and intent. The Black community has evolved over time and into the digital space from the physical to facilitate safety, leisure, joy, and freedom, which is a divergence in scope and temporality from the *Green Book*. In this paper, we discuss what our analysis reveals about the nature of the *Green Book* and Black Twitter, and what those findings mean in a broader context. Namely, we find that the ways in which the Black community has supported itself have evolved with available technologies, and the scope of succor has expanded alongside that evolution to cover more aspects of the experiences within the Black community. By building a bridge between the past and the present, researchers can be better positioned to envision what may come in the future. Our research contributes a unique thread to the computing literature by looking at the content of an online community, Black Twitter, while taking a long tail and historical perspective, tracing back to an information network utilized by the Black community during the Jim Crow era.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Negro Motorist Green Book

“With the introduction to this travel guide in 1936, it has been our idea to give the Negro traveler information that will keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trips more enjoyable...There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment. But until that time comes we shall continue to publish this information for your convenience each year.” - Introduction to the 1947 Edition of *The Negro Motorist Green Book* [70]

The Jim Crow era in the United States during which a set of laws enforced racial segregation was not an inevitable conclusion; it was carefully and consciously constructed [91]. The immediate period following the closing of the Civil War and abolition of slavery offered an unforeseen opportunity for the reimagination of American society and culture. Black Americans fought not only to be included in the nation but to transform its very meaning by contesting the color line, often bringing lawsuits against businesses and railways that attempted to enforce segregation. However, the compromise of 1877 between Republicans and southern conservatives culminated in the withdrawal of federal troops from former slave states, the retreat from Reconstruction, and the coming of Jim Crow [90]. Black Codes eroded the promises of the Reconstruction amendments.

In 1883, the Supreme Court overturned the Civil Rights Act of 1875, declaring it unconstitutional. But it was the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision of May 1896, contesting the legality of segregation on Louisiana's railways, that signified the complete legalization of discrimination and enshrined the doctrine of "separate but equal" as the law of the land [44]. Originating with the railways and the right to ride, the verdict sanctioned segregated facilities across the nation, including schools, buses, hotels, theaters, swimming pools, and beaches.

To be American while Black in the Jim Crow era was to be a problem, and to both literally and figuratively navigate segregation. Segregation required maintenance and enforcement of physical and figurative barriers - separate and unequal facilities, signage, service in the back of establishments, sundown towns, and the like. Therefore, confronting it required strategy. As public and private spaces increasingly became sites of violence, surveillance, and racial tension, Victor Green resisted the color line on America's roads and highways with his *Green Book*, one of the best resources for surviving and navigating Jim Crow America while Black. A postal carrier from Harlem who would often travel by car to visit his in-laws in Virginia, Green was exposed to America's landscape in ways that many in the Black community were unable to experience, and used his unique positionality to help them find safe harbor [78, 80]. Published between 1936 and 1966, the *Green Book* acted as a site of resistance, of community, and as a gateway to joy and leisure [78, 80]. As early as the 1910s, Black Americans saw car ownership as a sign of self-sufficiency and uplift [74]. Beginning in the 1930s, thanks to the decreased cost of automobiles and the increasing construction of the Interstate Highways [37], average middle-class Black families began to buy cars, allowing them to avoid segregated transportation. Nevertheless, the threat of Jim Crow remained real [40]. While motorists may have familiarized themselves with the traditional racial hierarchies of their communities, traveling to unfamiliar locales posed the risk of exposing oneself to peculiar institutions of segregation and unforgiving communities. Although automobiles protected them from the indignities of traveling on trains and public transportation, Black motorists were vulnerable to dangers on the open road - segregated eating places, refused service, racist law enforcement, or mob violence.

As a result, Black travel guides, modeled after similar publications for Jewish communities, began to flourish, providing readers with directories of safe places to eat, stay, visit, and find joy. Similar guides such as the "Hackley & Harrison's Hotel and Apartment Guide for Colored Travelers" or the "Go Guide to Pleasant Motoring" were available, but none were published as long as the *Green Book*, some only lasting a year or two [1, 62, 67]. Moreover, as a postal carrier, Victor Green utilized his involvement with the National Association of Letter Carriers for information and connections with the United States Travel Bureau to promote his endeavor. Julian Bond, former President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), described, "It was a guidebook that told you not where there were places to eat, but where there was any place [2]." Dino Green of South Carolina summarized the importance of the *Green Book* most clearly, stating, "... [it] didn't tell you if a place had a good steak, or good seafood, or had a soft bed... it told you where you would be safe; it told you where you'd be welcome and not made to go around the kitchen and order something to go...The rest [of the guide books out there] are just fluff. . . To my mind, it's still the only necessary travel guide that's ever been printed [3]." Covering services and venues from gas stations to mechanics, hotels to state parks, restaurants to nightclubs, barbershops, beauty shops, and eventually amusement parks, the *Green Book* not only provided a roadmap to segregated America and ways to revel recreation but also left behind a historical repository of the "meaning of being Black" at a specific phase of the "problem."

Ultimately, while the *Green Book* mapped out hidden and dispersed communities, it primarily served as a resource and tool rather than a social network. Before the fight for Civil Rights galvanized national attention, local communities and grassroots traditions built the movement brick-by-brick

in schools, churches, and neighborhoods [14, 59, 61]. Warriors like Ida B. Wells utilized the Black press to document injustice, call out Jim Crow, and organize across landscapes, making boycotts, marches, and nation calls to action possible [8, 63]. Responding to technological advancements in infrastructure and automotive development, the *Green Book* met a need and in the process created a roadmap to Black America in the age of segregation. However, as communication technologies such as radio and television evolved, so did opportunities for congregation and information sharing among the Black community [10, 83, 85].

2.2 Black Twitter

Black Twitter shares characteristics with other online communities for marginalized groups (including groups coalesced around an identity and a particular self presentation [27]). Online communities are social spaces where for years now community members have been able to find support and social interaction [51]. This is also true for people who are part of vulnerable and marginalized communities. Research has shown online communities play an important role for trans and/or non-binary communities [13, 31], queer communities [42], unhoused populations [48, 49, 87, 93], communities for persons living with disabilities (PWD) [25, 26, 38, 58, 79, 94], and senior/elderly communities [34, 92]. Although there is always the potential for harm within online platforms, these spaces for communities serve as valuable places for people of minority groups to turn to. Research shows for minority groups, especially those living in rural areas, online spaces sometimes are the main, or only, place where people can connect and interact with members of their community. A prime example is the LGBTQIA+ community, wherein research has shown the internet has been critically important for bridging ties among members who live in rural areas in the United States [29, 33]. In addition to connecting members, online communities foster spaces for marginalized folks to engage in sensemaking about their experiences, including harms including their experience doing everyday activities, such as “driving while Black” in America [54].

Marginalized communities online can also foster spaces where sensemaking about experiences and harms can take place [54]. The presence of community members online including the building of ties empowers those members. However, research shows that online spaces are also susceptible to disruption by outsiders who discompose people’s sense of safety [31]. Outsiders who do not share identities with the community members are known to appropriate the culture of marginalized communities online, especially when the community is subject to the gaze of those outsiders whether they are hostile or performing allyship [18].

In his book *Distributed Blackness*, André Brock defines Black Twitter as an online gathering in which its members identify as Black, create culturally relevant content, share information, and use the affordances of Twitter to engage in Black discourse, grow social affinities, and share commonalities of Black culture. Though non-Black users and people of color do participate in this community, to do so necessitates a strong understanding of Black Culture, shared experiences, and digital practices [12]. Similar to the *Green Book*, which was used as a means for the Black community to navigate systemic racism both locally and globally, Black Twitter has become a digital tool for the Black community to navigate analogous situations. However, there are challenges to Twitter as a platform relevant for the people who constitute Black Twitter. Twitter has faced rising pressure from civil rights organizations and concerned citizens to ban White supremacists [88], and law enforcement has increasingly used this and other social media environments for community policing efforts [41]. Furthermore, researchers have found tweets that use African-American English may be erroneously flagged as harmful [7].

As a marginalized online community, Black Twitter has not been explicitly used as a site of inquiry within HCI research. However, race and racism have increasingly become more prevalent topics of concern: for example, connections to critical race theory [56], ways in which technology can help

people cope with interpersonal racism [82], how technology can aid systemic discrimination [32], and more. Though Black Twitter is occasionally used as an example of an online community in computer science literature (as represented by ACM publications) [17, 20, 75], it does not appear as a dedicated research topic in ACM publications. Scholars in other research communities have compared Black Twitter to a counterpublic, or a space of conversation populated by marginalized people who use the space to counter dominant discourse and oppose stereotypical and “out of pocket” understandings of who they are [28, 36]. We aim to build on this prior work in our own research of Black Twitter and putting it into conversation with the *Green Book*. In the next section, we will explain our methods, analysis, and findings from exploring Black Twitter.

3 METHODS

Our work sought to draw attention to Black Twitter as an online community for a marginalized demographic and to draw out ties to historic mediums used by Black Americans to share information. The *Green Book*, too, provided a mechanism for readers to share information, which validated their lived experiences while making accessible information from the community about infrastructures of support, care, and uplift. Along these lines, our research analyzed the distinct content from Twitter and separately, the *Green Book*, while at the same time, drew historic lines and parallels between these mechanisms used by the Black community to share and seek information and resources. For example, the *Green Book* points its readers to ways to navigate traveling while Black in America by mapping to hotels, restaurants, and gasoline stations safe to use; a warning is issued when Twitter users employ the hashtag “while Black.” As such, both platforms validate the experiences, hardships, and achievements of Black communities in America. In addition, the mediums warn members/readers about racist structures, institutions, and incidents; this information sharing enables readers/members to navigate to safer or more supportive environments, whether on or offline. At the same time, Black Twitter and the *Green Book* are mechanisms/mediums that allow for a broad participation in information sharing and seeking, essentially everyone can consume and produce information valuable to the Black Twitter and Black communities in America. However, who acts on the information or is impacted by it is shaped by culture, institutions, and race in the United States.

In order to facilitate our research, we followed a specific series of steps. First, we qualitatively coded copies of the *Green Book* to learn important themes from the text, distinct from our content analysis of Black Twitter. The New York Public library has 23 digital scans of 25 editions of the *Green Book* ranging from 1937 to 1967 with two of the scans each including two editions (1963-4 and 1966-7). To code the *Green Book* data, two authors examined a subset of the scans, one from each decade (1937, 1947, 1957, and 1967), and conducted qualitative open coding for categories and themes [65]. We discussed the separate themes we each discerned and converged them into a collective list. Our analysis of the *Green Book* prompts an important question: what do similar information sharing and safety practices look like in modern terms?

Second, we conducted a separate content analysis on a subset of tweets from Black Twitter. Prior work on Black Twitter used a similar method as ours, relying on so-called “Blacktags” to identify, collect and analyze tweets that are part of the Black Twitter community [24, 28, 52, 60, 66, 86]. Using a similar method, with the goal to capture a broad range of conversations, we made Twitter API requests for a 5 week period in April and May 2020 for tweets in English, without limitation on location. Our API requests included the hashtags #BlackTwitter, #WhileBlack, and #BlackLivesMatter. After the first week’s data collection we added the hashtag #COVIDWhileBlack to capture tweets of Black experiences during the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic, as information sharing was becoming important for navigating and surviving structural inequalities and racism associated with and exacerbated by COVID-19. The #WhileBlack hashtag is a hashtag generally employed

by users to call attention to racist incidents [46]; we made requests for tweets associated with the hashtag for this reason. We also requested Twitter posts or replies that contained the keywords “racist” and “racism.”

After the five weeks of data collection, we had a total of 75,012 tweets. For the purpose of qualitative analysis, we created a random sample of 1,000 tweets from the data. A subset of the authors manually and independently conducted open coding on the random sample of tweets, drawing on grounded theory to develop annotations to identify themes and patterns in the Twitter content [16, 57, 64, 84]. Notably, our open coding and the annotations we produced from the Twitter data were distinct from those created from the *Green Book*; however, since first we open coded the *Green Book*, we paid particular attention to where themes in the Twitter data mapped to the themes of the *Green Book*. Next, we iteratively coded the Twitter data in consecutive rounds, refining and coding until a final set of annotations were agreed upon by each author. Before creating the final set of granular codes, we split the 1,000 tweets and each sorted the tweets into categories and discussed where we dis/agreed about the classifications. After finalizing the codes, we classified each tweet into these final categories. We returned to the data and labeled the tweets with a category and added any codes to the tweets for any categories that were missing. Once an initial round of qualitative coding was complete, we came together as a group to share the categories (e.g. annotations or labels). Then, we determined which categories represented general or important patterns in the data. We conducted a second round of qualitative coding using only these new codes. Table 1 lists the primary categories we used to annotate the Twitter data. After open coding the Twitter data, we met as a team to consider the primary themes that emerged. From the discussions, we wrote memos to describe those themes to guide our analysis. Again, while we kept in mind the themes populated from the *Green Book* while analyzing the Twitter content, the goal of our Twitter analysis was to distinctly learn about the content of Black Twitter; therefore, the annotations for the *Green Book* and Twitter data should be viewed as distinct codes from which parallels were later drawn. The *Green Book* analysis was first, and for this reason, going into the Twitter analysis, we knew that connections to the *Green Book* might be observed, but we did not aim to use the same annotations for the *Green Book* as for the Twitter analysis.

In reporting our results, we note that prior work regarding research ethics for Twitter has shown some users may be uncomfortable with their content being amplified beyond the platform, particularly when the content is on a sensitive topic or the user is in a vulnerable position [21, 23]. In weighing potential harms against the utility of direct quotes for this part of our analysis, we decided in reporting our results to employ ethical fabrication [55] and paraphrase tweets so that the substance is the same but that they are not discoverable through a search [15]. Additionally, as part of complementary research where we interviewed people who consider themselves part of Black Twitter [47], we heard from participants that their feelings about research depend in part on who the researchers are and how much they understand and have a desire to contribute to rather than take from the community. As such, we note that with respect to the positionality of the people conducting this research, the first and third authors identify as Black women at predominately white institutions, and the remaining authors are white and acknowledge their white privilege. It is also our intention to share the findings from this research to the community, and this work complements our further research that more directly gives voice to participants [47].

Lastly, we also recognize in comparing the content of Black Twitter and the *Green Book* that while the *Green Book* was an edited resource whose contributions provided substantiated content, the content of Black Twitter consists of unedited individual statements and expressions. Even though both collectively represented a community, the *Green Book* required a more diplomatic and palatable approach in its time. Whereas Black Twitter contains explicit content about racism, the

Green Book hints at systemic oppression and offers resources to navigate such maleficence. With these realities in mind, we forged carefully toward our findings.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Negro Motorist Green Book Findings

Here, we briefly describe the content of the subset of *Green Book* editions. Introductions explained the motivations for the *Green Book*. From the 1937 edition:

“The idea of the ‘Green Book’ is to compile facts and information with motoring, which the Negro Motorist can use and depend on” [68].

From the 1947 edition:

“The idea of ‘The Green Book’ is to give the Motorist and tourist a Guide not only of those Hotels and Tourist Homes in all of the large cities, but other classifications that will be found useful wherever he may be. Also facts and information that the Negro Motorist can use and depend upon” [70].

And from the 1957 edition:

“The White traveler has had no difficulty in getting accommodations, but with the Negro it has been different. He, before the advent of a Negro travel guide, had to depend on word of mouth, and many times accommodations were not available. Now things are different. The Negro traveler can depend on the ‘Green Book’ for all the information he wants, and has a wide selection to choose from” [72].

These introductions reaffirm that the text was made for Black Americans and to make travel easier and safer for them. This clear and explicit naming of purpose and audience is done implicitly on Black Twitter. The tweets intended for other Black people use knowledge of Black culture including the use at times of African American Vernacular English and blacktags (racialized hashtags) [76] to simultaneously locate and communicate with other Black people.

The bulk of each edition consisted of a directory of businesses that served Black patrons. The editions we analyzed listed over 90 categories of businesses. These included hotels and restaurants as well as services (e.g. tailors, pharmacies and cleaners), retail (e.g. shopping centers and sundries), recreation (e.g. beaches and amusement parks), and a variety of other categories such as car maintenance (e.g. repair shops and service stations), entertainment, and grooming. By making themselves available, Black businesses and people serving Black businesses could directly reach out to Black America. Within the directory, the *Green Book* also highlighted tourists destinations, including good vacation and leisure spots that welcomed Black tourists - emphasizing joy and entertainment geared toward Black travelers.

In addition to these directories, the books also included in-depth articles that helped articulate its priorities and politics, as subtle as they may have been. Many of these articles had a strong focus on Driving While Black, including advice on how to travel safely. The first edition of the *Green Book* heavily emphasized this, explaining what measures (Black) motorists can take to make the trip as easy as possible with few stops or needs to stop (repairs, ignition, lubrication, chains, cleanings). It included an article entitled “Preparedness” about the importance of maintaining a car for longer trips as well as a tongue-in-cheek article titled “How to Keep from Growing Old” about what not to do while driving. The “Preparedness” article began with the adage, “An Ounce of Prevention is worth more than a Pound of a Cure” [68]. Although the text shied away from addressing race explicitly, its emphasis on preparation responded to the dangers of Jim Crow. Black travelers not only navigated inconvenience, but also real threats of violence. Violating the color line could be met with lynching and race massacres [89]. While some places had clear landscape

markers dividing “Black” and “White,” others had more subtle demarcations. Whether or not there was clear signage, Black people were expected to vacate “sundown” towns before nightfall lest they face the consequences [53]. Preparing for a road trip often entailed packing blankets and pillows in case there was no lodging, food and drink if there was no restaurant, and gasoline if there was no service station that would serve them. Thus, although the *Green Book* did not openly declare that leaving the home was dangerous for Black people, its directory and articles directly responded to this widely understood reality. As the 1937 article explained, “be prepared before you start and more than likely you will have a pleasant and enjoyable trip with no regrets when you return” [68]. Rather than wait to find out what could happen, the *Green Book* allowed people to be prepared and have peace of mind before their journey began.

In some instances, the *Green Book* did address and document racism in a more head-on manner through reflection. While the *Green Book* was published by a Black husband and wife with the intention of helping the Black community, it remained an open secret and an open source. It was distributed by mail order and sold by businesses, particularly Esso service stations [71]. One did not have to be Black to access the book, which can perhaps account for some of its silences and subversive tactics. Nevertheless, an article in the 1947 edition, relaying a conversation about two men around travel, was more willing to address racism. One of the men remarked, “Gee...If there had been any such publication as this when I started traveling ‘way back in the [Eighteen] Nineties, I would have missed a lot of anxieties... When I first started jumping from place to place, just like White commercial travellers have been doing for time immemorial, [I] wondered if my bags were safe; and if the bed I acquired for the night would be mine alone; or if I would have the night companions” [70]. Referencing the 1890s, the conversation drew readers back to the institutionalization of Jim Crow and the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. Racism made the *Green Book* necessary, but if something like the *Green Book* had existed as a warning system back then, maybe travel could have been easier for the Black community.

Additionally, the *Green Book* facilitated community engagement by design. Although a print publication, the *Green Book* was never static or rigid. Every issue encouraged readers to provide feedback. As the introduction to the 1937 edition reads:

“In the event that you are dissatisfied with the service rendered by an advertiser, we appreciate you writing us the complaint, stating all the facts and conditions and we will immediately investigate your case and help to adjust same [sic]” [68].

The introduction to the 1947 edition also invites readers to share businesses for other travelers:

“There are thousands of places that the public doesn’t know about and aren’t listed. Perhaps you might know of some? If so, send in their names and addresses and the kind of business, so that we might pass it along to the rest of your fellow Motorists” [70].

Whether it be through recommendations for new listings or reviews of places listed in the *Green Book*, the text welcomed community engagement and information sharing. It allowed Black businesses and entrepreneurs, especially Black women, a chance to advertise their services. It provided space for users to give feedback. These printed responses often exposed segregated enclaves that the book helped them overcome. Moreover, it kept people safe by making clear where they should avoid. This information built the directory and protected it by its ability to change and respond to shifting landscapes.

Community engagement could also mean community uplift and political engagement. The publication of the *Green Book* was in and of itself a political act, opting to support the Black community in a subversive and encoded manner. But occasionally, the text appealed to readers directly, encouraging them to make the most of opportunities afforded to them in America’s changing landscape. In the wake of World War II, the federal government implemented programs

to help G.I.'s and make the American Dream attainable for them [5, 39, 43]. As Black veterans were being left behind and denied entry into White institutions, the *Green Book* broke down schools welcoming Black students state-by-state. Reprinting an article from the New York Times called "Money for Negro Colleges," the text supported education for Black veterans as well as financial support for these colleges. The article read, "The educated Negro was once a rarity. His numbers are increasing year by year, and his contributions to the arts, science and education steadily gain a wider and juster recognition for his abilities. From these we all gain, regardless of color. And, as we mutually put a proper, unprejudiced estimate on the contributions of all races to the common good, we move surely closer to the goal of living together in harmony" [70]. Despite avoiding overt engagements with political and racial discourse, the *Green Book* nonetheless responded to and altered its content as activists began challenging the reign of Jim Crow and the laws that necessitated the guide.

With the passage of landmark Civil Rights litigation and legislation, the *Green Book* embraced politics and activism in its own way, doing its part to keep the community informed and serve as a guide as the world changed beneath their feet. In 1954, the *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka* ruling formally dethroned *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and declared segregation unconstitutional. Desegregation did not occur immediately, but the *Green Book* responded by changing its listings to focus on the specific needs of motorists: hotels, motels, tourist homes, and restaurants. Rather than list the needs of the community as a whole - such as barbershops, nail salons, clubs, gas stations, and the like - the text focused on the types of accommodations all travelers seek out, suggesting a recognition that enforcing segregation was now illegal. In the 1957 edition, an article from the Nationwide Hotel Association read, in part, "Today we are making rapid strides in the field of interracial relations. In almost every section of the country color barriers are being broken down. Negroes in the past went into business to meet the needs of our people because other businessmen did not want our business. From the beginning we planned only to serve the Negro public; we had a monopoly" [72]. Similarly, the *Green Book* embraced and proclaimed the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, "a new bill of rights for everyone regardless of race, creed, or color." Straight and to the point, an article titled "Civil Rights: Facts vs. Fiction" informed readers "PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS: Effective at once, every hotel, restaurant, theater or other facility catering to the general public must do exactly that." The edition broke down that people needed to know their rights, listing state by state what civil rights people had access to but also how to enforce those rights [73]. No more did Black Americans need to navigate Jim Crow by avoiding conflict. They could fight back, even if it meant the *Green Book* was no longer needed.

Known as the "Bible of Black travel" during the Jim Crow era, the *Green Book* positioned itself as an all-encompassing resource for Black Americans of information intended to facilitate safe and enjoyable travel. Jim Crow was not only felt in signage and segregation, but also in the daily indignities of being treated like a second-class citizen. While the *Green Book* did not always explicitly fight against racism or advocate for direct political action, it gave Black Americans the chance to sojourn with dignity and a sense of independence. With the *Green Book* in hand, those accustomed to prejudice could side step difficult encounters: no having to be turned down from places that refused them service or expected entrance in the back, no having to be afraid of a car breaking down and being stranded in communities intending them harm, and no having to surrender the right to celebrate joy or achievement. At the time, Black Americans were expected to provide labor, not enjoy leisure. The *Green Book* helped enable them to come together, challenge those limitations, map out their own destinations, and enjoy the ride.

Table 1. Broad and sub-theme annotations

Broad Theme Code (number of tweets)	Sub-theme Code (number of tweets)
Social Justice (232)	Racism (343) Call-out (212) Police/criminal justice (81) Economic justice (30)
Information Sharing (228)	Resources (107) News (64) Warning and Safety (49) Requests for help (19) Information seeking (15) Data (12)
Community/Empowerment/Uplift (117)	Entertainment (121) Culture (84) Solidarity/Support (68) Family (53) Call to action (44) Celebrations (19)
Politics (111)	Presidential (63) Policy (29) Parties (24) Election (22)
Identity (60)	Gender (20) Sexuality (13) Immigrants (4) Class (3)
Business (50)	
Health (39)	COVID (152) Mental health (7)
Humor (30)	

4.2 Black Twitter: Finding Commonalities

In the following section, we describe the themes that emerged from our analysis of content from Black Twitter, including: information sharing, social justice, community, empowerment and uplift, and finally, business (please refer to Table 1 for a complete list of themes used to annotate the Twitter data). Subthemes were coded to further specify groupings within broader themes, however we will focus here on the themes which connect to the findings from the *Green Book* and put them in conversation.

4.2.1 Information Sharing. Information sharing tweets distribute knowledge and observations of current events, politics, including bullying in schools, Donald Trump, racism against Black people, COVID-19, and social movements. Information sharing tweets raise awareness of topics among people engaging with Black Twitter. Given the realities of Jim Crow, the *Green Book* served as

a guide to safety and preemptive warning to Black travelers also through information sharing. Beginning in 1946, the *Green Book* covers displayed a clear message with clear meaning: “Carry your *Green Book* with you...you may need it” [69].

Categorized within information sharing tweets were tweets offering messages of warning and safety. **Warning** and **safety** tweets share content to make users aware of dangers in lived and digital environments, structural features of society that are harmful (e.g. racism, sexism, xenophobia, ableism, violence). In this way, tweets that warn also inform of where and when spaces and places are safe, and how to navigate the harms of a discriminatory world. In our corpus, tweets call out White privilege, warning users of dangers associated with structural racism (e.g. armed protesters [predominately White] resisting coronavirus quarantine measures are ignored by the police whereas protestors decrying racism are arrested, violently beaten, and murdered by police).

“White Privilege gives a hallway pass to White people for anti-safety protests during COVID but not for anti-racism advocacy”

Paralleling the *Green Book*, warning tweets remind users that White spaces [6] not only exclude but demarcate where/how Black persons are harmed by White supremacy. The *Green Book* did not explicitly declare instances of racism or examples of White supremacy within its pages. Rather, the subversive text in its entirety documented and demarcated where and how Black people were harmed by White supremacy. The goal of the *Green Book* was to function as a warning system to help Black travelers avoid harm by listing and making evident places they would be welcomed. As stated in the 1957 edition, “The White traveler has had no difficulty in getting accommodations, but with the Negro it has been different. He, before the advent of a Negro travel guide, had to depend on word of mouth, and many times accommodations were not available. Now things are different. The Negro traveler can depend on the ‘*Green Book*’ for all the information he wants, and has a wide selection to choose from” [72]. In this regard, the silences of the *Green Book* warned readers of the harm. For example, areas with high concentration of businesses listed, such as Los Angeles, CA, could clearly be interpreted as safe places. Places with low or no businesses listed, such as Orange County, CA which did not make it into the *Green Book* until Disneyland was listed in the final edition, could be interpreted as unsafe.

“Black Twitter, TikTok refuses to acknowledge us except on derogatory terms, its algorithms erase the presence of brown and Black people except if someone other than us uses the N word. This is disgusting”

In addition to warning and safety messages, information sharing tweets are distributed **news**, **resources**, and **requests for help**. Here are some examples, respectively:

“This is Systemic Racial Discrimination: 70% of COVID19 Deaths in Mississippi were Black People”

“A Black Owner of Multiple Restaurants is Giving Away Free Food to Hungry Families”

“How can I tell my boss to stop using Racist language and keep my job? Help #Blacktwitter”

The directory function of the *Green Book* also served this purpose. Readers could recommend listings to add as well as inform the publishers of places that did not in reality serve the Black community. One correspondent wrote of Gordon, Nebraska: “No Negro families here – likely could stay at Cabin camps. Do not know attitude of hotels. Yellow Cabins - Gordon, Neb., would take Negroes” [71]. While the speed and breadth of information shared differed between the two sources, the *Green Book* and Black Twitter serve(d) the Black community by keeping it informed.

4.2.2 Social Justice. Social justice refers to how resources, assets or wealth and power are distributed across and within communities in a society [19]. In our tweet corpus, social (in)justice messages hark to ideas about how resources and assets (that are economic, governmental and social)

were (un)fairly allocated among populations by demographics. In other words, the tweets called attention to the distribution of socioeconomic power, and were labeled "social justice" accordingly.

"#BlackTwitter, Did y'all know? Historically, in some rural communities, Asian store owners extended financing to workers living in poverty. Because Jim Crow never paid a living wage."

These types of businesses mentioned in the above Tweet would have served as the backbone of the *Green Book*. Although the *Green Book* did not always openly engage in politics, the listing of Black businesses and businesses serving the Black community allowed for activism through spending and protecting Black dollars. The social justice tweets covered a range of topics, such as racism, economic and criminal justice, and naming injustices and harms. For instance, under the "branch" of "calling out," messages identified behaviours, actions, people, and institutions for failing Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, as well as incarcerated people, and more. The calling-out tweets highlighted where/how systemic discrimination took place.

Of the tweets analyzed, we coded 343 to have the label **racism**. Among "racism" tweets, Black Twitter users related stories of racist incidents or the racism they experienced daily. Of all the themes, racism was the most prevalent theme in the tweet corpus. Black Twitter's response to racism is more blunt than that of the *Green Book*, but articles like "Preparedness" from the first edition convey similar messaging: racism is real and felt, and the Black community must be ready for it. "An Ounce of Prevention is worth more than a Pound of a Cure" [68].

"A Black person cannot even walk out their front door without getting arrested for being on their own property"

"I walked my dog this morning. There was nobody outside in the neighborhood. Still looked behind my back every few minutes, afraid to get murdered by police for being Black and present"

"Black people who advocate for human rights never get hired"

By naming racist actions, such as when law enforcement unlawfully criminalized Black people when they engaged in lawful activities, Black Twitter community members described how they processed and made sense of racism in their everyday lives. In our tweet corpus, we found that users' sense-making (e.g. their theorizing about how/why racism happened) turned from identifying racist actions to demanding accountability from individuals and institutions.

"Everything I do while Black is legal and a crime: walking, shopping, and now wearing a mask as mandated by the Governor to protect others from coronavirus."

"Don't hire police officers who cannot tell the difference between lawful activity and a crime. That's the whole job."

In tweets, people's calls for justice bridged the discriminatory practices taken against the Black Twitter community to their witnessing and surviving everyday life while Black in America. In relation, people issued calls to actions that demanded the public to invest in counteractions to racist deeds and institutions. In Twitter posts, people portrayed how multifaceted identities (e.g. gender, immigration status, political affiliation, etc.) were linked to how structural racism affected them, their sense of belonging, and (in)justice in society.

Tired of the unpaid labor I have to do to survive being Black in America. Tired of trying to make people believe racism is a tax: our time, our money, and our right to equal opportunity. Tired of people who believe when we say Black Lives Matter that the slogan calls for their White Lives to Matter More"

“Black Americans are less than 9% of the population in Minnesota but 40% of COVID patients. Forcing people to vote in person is racist.”

“Only ignorance supports those who love systems of oppression and hate. Please, never let their ignorance stop you from knowing your worth.”

As the Civil Rights Movement accrued victories, the *Green Book* more overtly responded to and named structural racism and confronted politics head-on. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, only then was the *Green Book* able to encourage readers to fight for their rights and “make it clear that the Negro is only demanding what everybody else wants . . . what is guaranteed all citizens by the Constitution of the United States” [73]. Whereas the social justice aspects of the *Green Book* were predominantly subtle up until the last editions, Black Twitter fosters a space for conversations and calls to action about injustice that are direct and explicit.

4.2.3 Community, Empowerment & Uplift. In coding the Twitter posts, we applied the labels **community**, **empowerment** and **uplift** to note where these themes showed up. We annotated the tweets with the code “community” when a message portrayed or questioned how people relate to one another or how they belong to and engage in culture. We added **solidarity** and/or **support** labels to community tweets if the tweet acknowledged, empathized, and buoyed up understanding for people or communities. In the “community” tweets, we found the tweets also expressed statements of uplift to the Black Twitter community. At the same time, many “uplift” tweets communicated the reality of racism in America to build solidarity, support, and community.

“George Floyd spoke a truth when he said we will reach a better tomorrow together. His words are the hope of a better America especially when compared to the violent history against Black people, and the reality of living while Black in America.”

“Do Your Thing, Twitter. Call to Action: The most at risk people are Indigenous, Disabled and Imprisoned. Demand #BlackLivesMatter. Retweet and Share.”

“#BlackSolidarity welcomes everyone. Let’s expand the community! Let people know! I see you! #OneMillionBlackFollowers”

In the community tweets, Black Twitter users posted about family and parenting. By listing family-friendly vacation spots, the *Green Book* did its part to encourage Black family celebrations without shame. Martin Luther King revealed the importance of community guides like the *Green Book* in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” in which he explains the sting of segregation writing of the frustration: “...when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can’t go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward White people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five year old son who is asking: “Daddy, why do White people treat colored people so mean?”[45] Family tweets discussed a range of matters important to people who share close ties or associations, whether biological or not, and how they related to and cared for one another.

“Power to every Black mother this Mother’s Day, we live everyday without knowing if our children will return home after going outside to experience everyday Racism in America.”

In coding the tweets, we found another common theme was **culture**. In our annotations, tweets labeled “culture” referred to community norms, values, and ways of engaging in meaning-making around intellectual works, and the arts, fashion, entertainment, humor, and language. The *Green Book* supported Black culture in documenting those businesses important to the culture - like hair

salons, barber shops, venues, and other facilities catering to Black fashion - in earlier editions prior to the *Brown v. Board* decision of 1954.

In “culture” tweets, we observed users debated what defined belonging to the Black Twitter community in relation to culture, for example, if belonging was defined by a user’s awareness and participation in the community’s art, entertainment, language, entrepreneurial activities, and values.

“Wearing My Own Hair while Black means White People Gawking and Offended”

“Love and Positive Affirmations for Black Families in America #BlackTwitter #Support-BlackBusiness”

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, business and spending became important indicators of community belonging. In many ways, Victor Green’s book directly responded to contemporaneous calls for self-determination and positive affirmation for Black communities. New Deal policies often ignored the Black community, and as a result of Jim Crow practices, Black workers and communities struggled to survive. At the time, James Allen, president of the Harlem branch of NAACP, lamented, “I don’t know of any section of New York City that is harder hit by unemployment than Harlem and I don’t know of any section that is doing so little about it” [30]. Green, a Harlem resident, started publishing the text during the “Buy Where You Can Work” and “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” protests of the 1930s [77]. Cities across the nation, including New York and its boroughs, encouraged people to boycott stores that refused to hire Black Americans and spend their money elsewhere. Thus, the *Green Book* gave agency to the community, enabling them to support “the culture” and identify who belonged in it.

We labeled tweets **empowerment** when the tweets affirmed the lives and experiences of Black people, both in general and as individuals. From time to time, the *Green Book* celebrated important “History Makers,” such as A.G. Gaston, self-made millionaire [73]. Empowerment and uplift tweets celebrate Blackness and illuminate the joy in Black art, love, and life. In this way, the messages reflect aspects of the Black Lives Matter movement that celebrates the same.

“Black is the beauty of all colors”

Celebrations and calls to action were the main sub-themes emerging within empowerment and uplift, and we focus on these tweets for that reason. Celebrations are defined as tweets that salute, recognize, acknowledge, and praise Black culture, including the arts, entertainment and media, as well as the achievements of Black business owners, entrepreneurs, activists, and communities. Messages of this category and of the social justice theme attempt to situate and balance activism, and the pain, hurt, intellectual labor, and fight against anti-Black racism with threads acting as a balm and call for self care. We also saw celebration and calls to action within the *Green Book*. The 1947 edition called on its readers to provide financial support to schools and colleges supporting Black education as White institutions denied Black G.I.’s [70]. Calls to action are described as messages requesting that users take specific actions of care, support, empowerment and mutual aid by visiting and spreading awareness of Black-owned businesses and Black entrepreneurs. Calls to action also included requests to oppose businesses that uplift White supremacy, support structural racism, and that are anti-Black empowerment.

“Stop giving money to racist corporations! These companies promote anti-Black vitriol while bankrolling politicians and institutions that kill us. Consumers have power; use it wisely.”

Calls to actions exhibited other ethical tensions in light of calls for care and celebration. For example, some calls were to doxx individuals. Doxxing (or the public release of personally identifiable information, such as a home address or phone number) calls, while debated, ask us to consider

power imbalances. What does it mean to thrive in and survive the situations, spaces, and systems where White supremacy means that institutions of accountability, such as the law, harm Black persons? Nonetheless, the “celebrations” and “calls-to-action” themes trace to themes in the *Green Book*, specifically: how the book was a medium to highlight prominent Black entrepreneurs and community members in the context of travel and entrepreneurship around the country.

4.2.4 Business.

Check out these face masks I make on Etsy! #BlackOwnedBusiness #ShopBlack #Black-Twitter

We categorized tweets of business and entrepreneurship under the theme “Business” to learn what connections existed between the support of Black-owned businesses taking place on Black Twitter and the *Green Book*. Among tweets labeled “Business” are those that mention industry, jobs, searching for opportunity, Black excellence in entrepreneurship, and products or service provision.

“Don’t give up! There are so many jobs! Search on Monster.com or online job boards.”

The category directly relates to the *Green Book* because the tweets call attention to Black-owned businesses and industrial pursuits. Among business tweets, though unlike the *Green Book*, users post to both encourage and discourage patronage. Businesses are called out for not serving Black people, for example, as well as people who belong to different marginalized demographics. The *Green Book* was designed to intentionally address the safety concerns and needs of Black travelers and to share recommendations of where to find hotels and lodging, gasoline, and food and groceries. Black Twitter takes this a step further by also calling users’ attention to where not to go or give patronage.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The *Green Book* helped countless Black travelers over three decades and fiercely upheld its intention to facilitate “vacation without aggravation” [73]. The main offerings of the *Green Book* were a directory of businesses and tourist attractions that welcomed Black patrons. In addition to this local, national, then international network of lodging, eateries, services, and points of interest, the *Green Book* also provided resources for staying safe on the road, articles to support the advancement and education of Black people, and practical information about and advocacy for civil rights.

Flashing forward to the 21st century, Black Twitter presents itself as a safe space for today’s Black community, discussing politics, entertainment, health, and more as people in the Black diaspora, and onlookers, interact. The two sites of the *Green Book* and Black Twitter share similarities in what they offered and to whom, but where they diverge exposes how the affordances of the digital space open up possibilities unthought of at the time of Victor Green’s publication.

Starting from points of commonality, both Black Twitter and the *Green Book* expressly engage with the Black community. The *Green Book* focused on Black travelers specifically, whereas Black Twitter coalesces around the Black diaspora. Both facilitate information sharing that includes news as well as businesses to patronize (and by omission ones to avoid in the *Green Book* or by explicitly calling out on Black Twitter). Community is fostered and celebrated in both spaces as well. The *Green Book* features articles about and images of travelers and encourages readers to write in either about their traveling experiences or to share possible additions to the directory. Black Twitter welcomes celebrations, personal stories, and opportunities to rally together. Next, issues of social justice like civil rights come up in the *Green Book* and on Black Twitter. Taking into consideration the operation of the *Green Book* as an open secret and the implicit and explicit equipping of its readers to know their rights and safe spaces as they travelled allows the *Green Book* to be interpreted as an activist text [4]. Finally, while the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter began on

Facebook, Twitter also became a platform in which activists organized, mobilized, and coordinated [60].

These shared benefits and offerings across physical/digital space and time point to the ways in which the Black community has, is, and likely will be supporting itself against racism and working toward a full life of joy, leisure, and freedom. Connecting the physical artifact of the *Green Book* to the digital space of Black Twitter links an aspect of the Black community's history to its contemporary manifestation. Building such a bridge orients the past and the present together and opens space for contemplation of a future expression of the Black community's innovations as it insists on not only surviving but thriving. Part of this future vision comes into focus as we shift to recognizing where and how the *Green Book* and Black Twitter diverge. The *Green Book* is a collection of physical books, and though much of it has been digitized, it began in and was designed for the physical world. Black Twitter, on the other hand, coalesced in the digital space. The affordances between the physical and digital space offer those who engage with them different possibilities. Wear and tear as well as information anchored in time are cons of a physical object that are addressed in the digital space. As long as one has access to the digital space, and is willing to contend with occasional bad actors, the cons of the digital space are counterbalanced by its pros of access, information, and possibilities to express oneself and connect with others instantly.

Another divergence between the two entities is their scope. The *Green Book* focuses literally on specific spaces intended for Black travelers and is tied temporally to the past. Black Twitter is intended for people who identify as belonging to the Black diaspora, and encompasses a broader range of topics and usages (connection, communication, humor, culture, entertainment, etc). The temporality of Black Twitter, unlike the *Green Book*, encompasses the recent past and the present in terms of direct engagement and use. Online communities like Black Twitter have the capacity to take on and hold space for as much of the expressions of humanity as codes of conduct (and often, moderation by algorithm) may allow. The vast openness within spaces such as Black Twitter to accommodate so much of who a person is gives rise to a myriad of expressions and reactions that constitute a novel avenue for one to many connections.

Next, the *Green Book* and Black Twitter possess different structures as resources. The *Green Book* editions each have an introduction, table of contents, and a directory with advertisements and articles interspersed. Black Twitter, on the other hand, is an amalgamation of tweets each containing up to 280 characters (if the tweet was posted after Twitter doubled the maximum character count in 2017). Tweets may contain hyperlinks, embedded images or videos, emoticons or emoji. As the *Green Book* is an edited book created by Victor Green, the nature of the reportage it facilitates is different from Black Twitter which allows individuals to express themselves in an unedited fashion. The *Green Book* assumes its readers are Black travelers and orients its content as palatable in case it is seen by non-Black readers. Black Twitter content assumes readers are mixed company and the content at times includes Black culture and oral traditions which obfuscates the full meaning of the content to those who are not in the know. The orientation of Black Twitter content encompasses a wider collection of topics. While it is unfortunate that Black people still need to navigate racism decades after the *Green Book*, the space for doing so allows for a wider variety of expressions and the ability to foster community.

The exercise of comparing the *Green Book* to Black Twitter reveals how much more sophisticated both the Black community and White supremacy have grown overtime in their respective efforts to thwart and maintain systemic oppression. Resources for navigating racism like the *Green Book* from the 1930s to the 1960s were subtle, amenable, and implicit. Today, Black Twitter contains tweets which very explicitly and blatantly show, share, and call out racism. As gains from the Civil Rights Movement are rolled back [50] and state sanctioned violence against Black people is documented via social media apps [11], the sinister nature of White supremacy grows as it entrenches itself

with technology to further its agenda [9]. In additional research, we interviewed people who use Twitter and are familiar with Black Twitter. Through these interviews, we discovered the joys (e.g. community building, empowerment, information sharing) and challenges (e.g. outsiders, appropriation, racism) of Black Twitter [47]. It is in these challenges where Black Twitter has to contend openly within the constructs of Twitter that speak to how dealing with White supremacy and its many branches codified into the digital space creates ongoing trials and trauma different from the experience during Victor Green's time. Researchers are just beginning to consider what anti-racist social technologies can entail [81], so perhaps we can also begin to imagine new virtual spaces for the Black Twitter of tomorrow.

What will the coming together of the Black community look like in the future? Perhaps more Black people will embrace the skills to create technologies expressly intended for other Black people that will foster deeper connections across time and space. We could facilitate this future by supporting the broadening of participation in computing and technology spaces as well as encouraging play and exploration with existing tools that may spark new ideas. As the *Green Book* imagined and hoped for a future where it was not needed, what would Black Twitter (and life offline) be like if it did not have to contend with racism? The ability to change the future may well begin with an imagination that can cast a vision for a new one [35].

Until that future arrives, our work points to promising directions for social computing research. First, incorporating more comparative analysis with the digital humanities and historical perspectives can yield rich insights. Second, more research exploring how marginalized groups navigate racism, White supremacy, and systemic oppression with various technologies could continue to shine light on opportunities for technologies to support such efforts. Third, researchers could increase the involvement of people from marginalized communities into their work, from algorithmic audits to the building of tools used to address harassment or racism. If a platform could be designed to better support the ways Black Twitter is using Twitter, the community of Black Twitter would need to be involved every step of the way. Similar to the co-designing project that Harrington and Dillahunt conducted with Black youth [35], researchers could invite marginalized communities to the table of inquiry to help shape and take part in discoveries that will surely help serve their communities.

Embracing technologies from books to Twitter has allowed the Black diaspora to expand how the Black community connects by dimension and scope. We selected a subset of the *Green Book* editions and a collection of tweets from Black Twitter and asked how the two sets of data were related. Through our analysis, we have contributed an overview of the content present in both the *Green Book* and a subset of tweets that constitute a portion of Black Twitter. The themes present in both sets of content were put into conversation to bring into relief the trajectory of change and transition parts of the Black community endured as efforts to navigate racism evolved over time. The implications of our research include the insight that the Black community continues to employ the technology available to them to survive and thrive in the face of oppression. Our analysis also implies the need for additional research from the social computing community on communities like Black Twitter to better understand how these communities appropriate technology as well as how to design technologies to support them. By exploring a relic of the past and connecting it to a contemporary treasure, we learned more about how far the Black community has come and discovered clues as to where it may be headed.

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