

# White Paper Report

Report ID: 109430

Application Number: HD5180113

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Institution: Independent Feature Project

Reporting Period: 5/1/2013-1/31/2014

Report Due: 4/30/2014

Date Submitted: 5/2/2014

White Paper  
HD 51801-13  
Traveling While Black

Traveling While Black (TWB) is a groundbreaking, explosive, media-rich multi-platform project that portrays the often-harrowing journeys that black Americans have taken over the last eight decades in the United States, from the advent of automobile ownership to today's climate of stop-and-frisk and racial profiling. The project will foster dialogue, shifts in perception, and a safe space for reflection, inspire empathy among audiences and create a sense of inclusion v. exclusion that mirrors the African-American experience.

The American story of the African-American experience of automobile travel holds a mirror up to race relations and the legal and societal frameworks that have allowed rampant discrimination throughout the history of this country.

As a black middle class emerged in the early- to mid-20th century, car ownership among African-Americans grew. But African-Americans often faced a variety of obstacles and dangers while on the road. They were often refused service or accommodation, and they often faced the threat of violence or expulsion from whites-only towns. To ensure safety and convenience for African-American travelers, Harlem postman Victor Green worked with a network of postal workers to publish *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, listing the names, addresses and telephone numbers for countless businesses, private homes and other goods and services necessary for safe and comfortable travel.

The story of how African Americans organized, pooled their resources, and provided travel support for their community – using resources such as *The Negro Motorist Green Book* – demonstrates a communal strength and strategic resistance in a pre-civil rights society. This resistance has enabled the black community to overcome the barriers thrown in their paths. The recent shooting of Trayvon Martin, the contentious debates around stop-and-frisk laws, the many incidences of racial profiling and violence are all such clear evidence that these barriers persist into the 21<sup>st</sup> century that the American public and its media are once again engaged in a debates about the issues raised by “Traveling While Black.”

TWB uses individual stories to weave a cohesive tapestry of experience. The team behind this project is working together to create an ecosystem of stories and experiences that creates a national cultural movement through a variety of elements. Each creates an entry point into the TWB core story and issues a separate call of action for its own specific and unique audience. The backbone of the strategy is personal storytelling – individual stories of coping and strategy that will demonstrate various experiences through which audiences will see themselves and feel empathy.

Through the foregoing ecosystem of stories, TWB will illuminate the individual experiences of African-American men and women today, who cope and strategize and resist daily against similar societal barriers, through the lenses of history and contemporary stories. These experiences will hold up a mirror to those who travel

through our country today and face discrimination because of their race, ethnicity, or appearance, and open a window into a broadened reality and perspective. It offers the opportunity for those who carry an implicit bias to develop empathy.

Guided by Academy Award winning director Roger Ross Williams, whose personal perspective and experience sheds light on the universal experience of travel, TWB will provoke thought, shift perceptions, and provide a safe space for audiences to share and reflect. Audiences will gain a rich understanding of a complex aspect of our nation's history that resonates from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to this day. We believe that TWB will broaden the public's understanding of the harsh realities of the pre-civil rights era and provide context and a model for addressing contemporary social justice issues. Lonnie G. Bunch III, Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture and Advisor and Collaborator with TWB, agrees, "If one wants to explore the changing definitions of American citizenship, liberty, and equality, where better than through the black experience?"

The TWB core story is thoroughly American, but one that has global resonance. As we move deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the forces of globalization, continuously mixing identities and ethnicities, and the increasing rates of mass migration, are all causing a shift in the way people are perceived and treated. Each media and outreach element of the TWB platform will demonstrate through personal stories and intimate experiences how the same collective spirit embodied in the creation of *The Green Book* will resonate today with audiences who face their own barriers to movement. Today's 21st Century equivalents of the *Green Book* networks can be found in the form of civic, religious, educational, and advocacy which continue to inform, support, and advocate for Americans who are perceived as "other." By sourcing stories of travel from these networks, and from people in communities, we will inform, inspire and provide a platform to facilitate dialogue about issues from the past that still resonate today and how to collectively address them. TWB will source the contributions of people from across the nation as they share their stories and their resources and build future links for other minority groups. The right to travel freely without the threat of violence, safely and with dignity is something that should concern us all.

Through the awarding funds from the NEH Digital Development grant we were able to add new key team members Playmatics partners, Nick Fortugno and Margaret Wallace, Dana Dansereau, Web Ecosystem Consultant, and Outreach and Engagement Consultant Lina Srivastava to provide conceptual and strategic direction to the interactive project elements. Playmatics used this content to brainstorm game ideas, and create a concept for a mobile game that reflects the seriousness and the emotional depth of the content, and marks an unprecedented, innovative, and community-centric approach to the depiction of racial issues in games. Dansereau used this content to ideate the interactive design. These two elements were brought together in a preliminary proposal for Game Development and Transmedia Team review. These proposals were reviewed and integrated into a larger design document for the entire transmedia ecosystem of *Traveling While Black*, consisting of the mobile game, the community focused web portal, the documentary film, and the immersive museum exhibition.

Playmatics continued to further develop the game design, building on the logic of the greater ecosystem and focusing on the game's role as a visceral experience of the phenomenon of "traveling while black." This resulted in a concept document that provides further details about gameplay and the next phase of production. This concept has been vetted with stakeholders and humanities advisors. The completed game design was reintegrated into general ecosystem design and scoped for full production. Similarly, exhibition and web portal design continued to evolve and become more integral parts of the ecosystem. Meetings with the Smithsonian Institute and the Southern Law Poverty Center solidified additional subject matter experts and advisors, and their feedback was incorporated into concept direction. A final document was prepared detailing the general transmedia ecosystem and each element in detail including concepts, design approaches, production schedules and budget.