

LCM

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS MAGAZINE
JULY/AUGUST 2021

ROAD TRIP!

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Finding America
Out on the Road

Taking a Full-Length
Portrait of the U.S.

Plus

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SEE AMERICA



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Photographer Carol M. Highsmith is taking a full-length portrait of the U.S.

■ A neon sign in Amarillo, Texas, marks the path of historic Route 66 through town. *Carol M. Highsmith Archive/ Prints and Photographs Division*



THE GREEN BOOK

This guide helped Black travelers navigate the country in safety and with dignity.

For African American travelers of the mid-20th century, discrimination had no borders.

At that time, open and often legal discrimination made it difficult for Blacks to travel around not just the South but much of the United States because they couldn't eat, sleep or buy gas at most white-owned businesses.

The Negro Motorist Green Book helped them do so in safety and with dignity: The book identified businesses – lodgings, restaurants, gas stations and others – friendly to Black travelers so they could get service along the road.

"The gift of the Green Book was that it really did show the communities where Black culture was happening, where there were Black-owned businesses where you knew you could get services," said Candacy Taylor, author of "Overground Railroad: The Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America," in an interview with the Library's American Folklife Center. "It was literally a lifesaver."

Taylor's research for the book was funded in part by an Archie Green fellowship from

the Folklife Center, and interviews she conducted with owners of businesses listed in the Green Book are available on the Library's website.

The Green Book was founded by Harlem postal worker Victor Hugo Green in 1936 and over the next three decades became so indispensable that it earned the nickname "the Bible of Black travel." The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, however, made the book less necessary, and in 1967 it ceased publication.

Today, historical copies of the Green Book provide a record of places that played an important role in the lives of both ordinary people and great figures in African American history. Martin Luther King Jr. previewed his "I Have a Dream" speech for associates at the Hampton House in Miami and got haircuts at the Ben Moore Hotel in Montgomery, Alabama. Cassius Clay celebrated his upset of Sonny Liston – and met with Malcolm X – at the Hampton's café.

Five decades after it ceased publication, the Green Book still stands as a milestone for African Americans along the road to freedom.



■ African American patrons fill the Dew Drop Inn, a nightclub listed in the New Orleans section of the Green Book. The club hosted such great musicians as Ray Charles, James Brown, Etta James and Little Richard, who wrote a song about the place. American Folklife Center

MORE INFORMATION

The Green Book: Documenting African American Entrepreneurs
go.usa.gov/xHXND

Podcast with Candacy Taylor
go.usa.gov/xHnxY

ONLINE OFFERINGS



■ Clockwise from top left: Vintage travel posters present an abstract view of Times Square; provide a look across the bay in San Juan, Puerto Rico; and show Yellowstone's Old Faithful geyser in mid-eruption. *Prints and Photographs Division*



THEY'RE A TRIP

Travel posters from the golden age still inspire viewers to explore.

Great travel art takes you places, even when you haven't left home. Just by looking, one can feel the color and excitement of Times Square, the sea air in a lush garden in Puerto Rico, the spray from an eruption of Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park.

The Library holds thousands of travel posters designed to inspire viewers to visit points of interest, to revel in holiday activities and to enjoy the journey itself through various modes of transportation.

Many date from the golden age of the travel poster, which began in the 1920s, when travel by land or sea was more common than travel by air. The golden age ended in the 1960s, when photographic imagery and other forms of advertising began to be used more than graphically designed posters.

A selection of the Library's collection of travel posters are available online in the Free to Use and Reuse set; most of these were produced by the Work Projects Administration between 1936 and 1943.

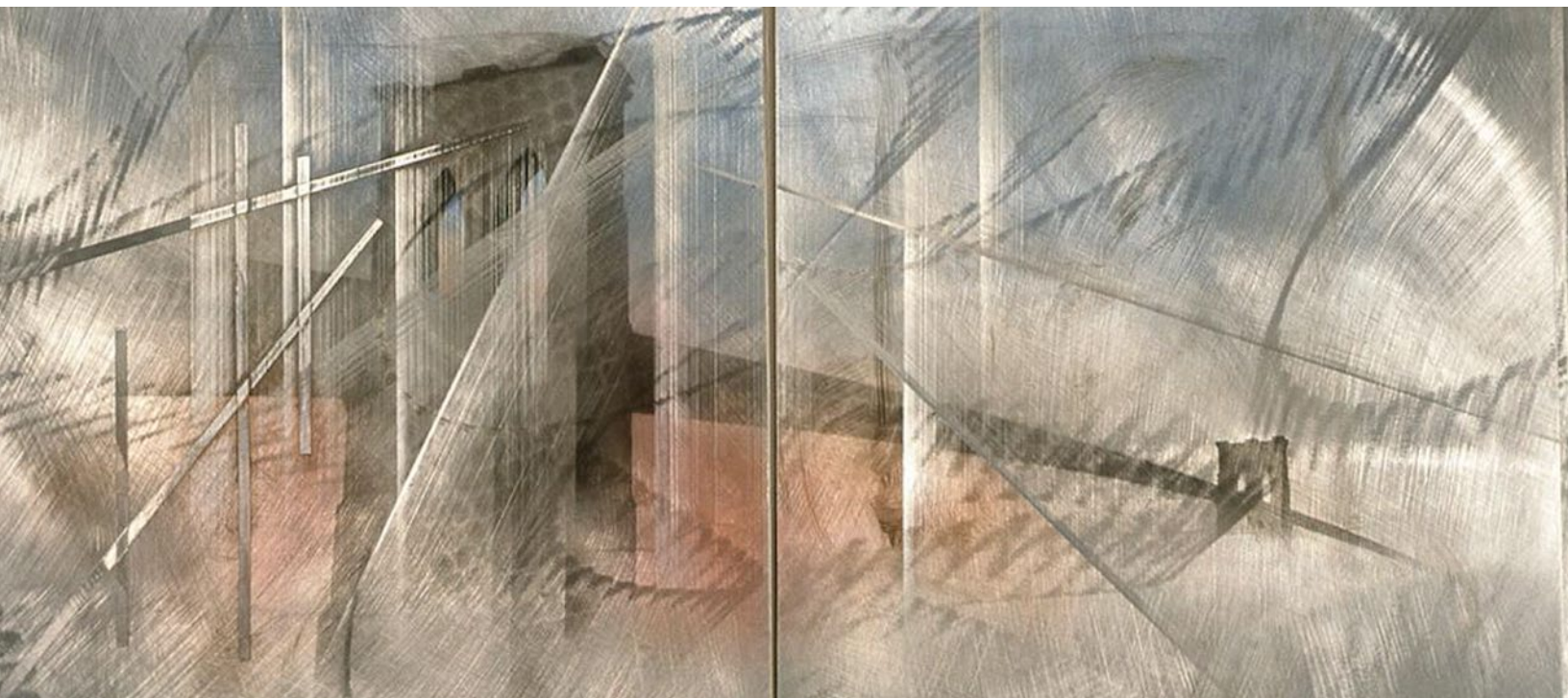
These posters, some created for the United States Travel Bureau, celebrated national parks and encouraged all to "See America" – the catchphrase on a number of them. The bureau was established in 1937 to promote travel within the United States.

Gifts, purchases and copyright deposit have added to the variety of travel posters in the broader collection. Eye-catching examples made in the U.S. and in other countries encourage exploration of places near and far – still today, an inspiration to pack a bag and go explore.

–Jan Grenci is a reference specialist in the Prints and Photographs Division.

MORE INFORMATION

Free to Use and Reuse: Travel Posters
[loc.gov/free-to-use/travel-posters/](https://www.loc.gov/free-to-use/travel-posters/)



HEAVY METAL

A deeply felt tribute to a bridge in a book made of aluminum.

The iconic suspension bridge that connects Brooklyn and Manhattan has inspired great art and artists since the day it opened nearly 140 years ago.

Frank Sinatra sang about the Brooklyn Bridge. Georgia O’Keeffe and Andy Warhol painted it. Walker Evans photographed it, and Hart Crane wrote an epic poem about it. The bridge makes countless cameos in film – “It Happened in Brooklyn,” “Moonstruck,” “Spider-Man” and many others.

To those works, add Donald Glaister’s 2002 book “Brooklyn Bridge ... A Love Song,” an homage that is as innovative as it is heartfelt. The book, along with other works by Glaister, are held by the Library’s Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

Ordinary materials wouldn’t do for a volume about such an iconic structure. So, Glaister, a master bookbinder, built his book out of stuff more befitting the subject: aluminum, wire, sand, acrylic paint, aluminum tape and

polyester film. The volume itself is housed in a felt-lined aluminum box.

Glaister made the book’s pages out of sanded aluminum, and on them he emblazoned a poem he had written in tribute and his own painted “portraits” of the span. Granite and limestone towers loom against the rose and blue of a morning sky. Shifting colors evoke different times of day, and abstract forms suggest the massive network of cables that holds the deck some 127 feet above the East River.

The Brooklyn Bridge – designed by John Roebling and completed by his son, Washington Roebling in 1883 – was the longest suspension bridge in the world at the time of its opening. It has experienced much since.

Glaister’s verse – like the materials that carry it – celebrates the bridge’s strength and timeless grace:

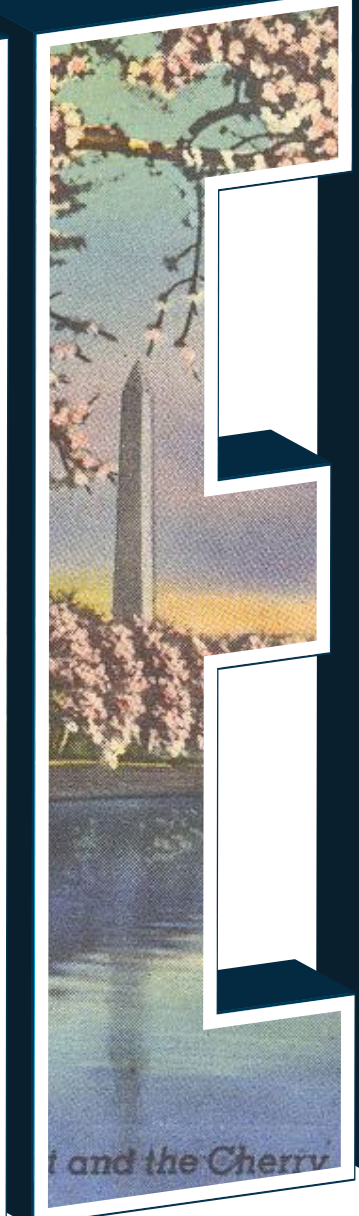
*The Bridge endures.
She has seen it all. Peace and war,
plenty and need, vice and honor,
the sublime and the horrific.
She stands watch and does not yield.
The gracious lady stands in the river
and does not yield.*

–Mark Hartsell

■ Master bookbinder Donald Glaister constructed this homage to the Brooklyn Bridge from aluminum, wire, sand, acrylic paint and other materials. Rare Book and Special Collections



FINDING





ON THE ROAD

A journey through a quintessentially American phenomenon, the family vacation by car.

BY JOSH LEVY



Mary Macdonald, and her father, A.B. Macdonald,
drinking at the spring on the "Den Road"
hill, between the narrows and Jensen.
This was on the last day of our vacation,
after we had said "good bye" to the
Washademoak and were driving on
the first stage of the long journey to
Kansas City.

As a boy I often drove my father over this
road, and we always stopped to
water the horse at this spring, and
we often drank from it.
I said "Good Bye" to this spring with
a sad beating heart.

In 1960, John Steinbeck set out on a monthslong road trip to reacquaint himself with his country. He returned not with clear answers but with his head a “barrel of worms.” The America he saw was too intertwined with how he felt in the moment, and with his own Americanness, to permit an objective account of the journey. “External reality,” he wrote, “has a way of being not so external after all.”

Pandemics aren't the only reason Americans have found sanctuary in our homes, or the only anxious times we've itched to escape them. The American road trip was first popularized during the auto camping craze of the 1920s, with its devotion to freedom and communing with nature, but it was democratized after World War II. The golden age of the American family vacation came during the very height of the Cold War. It was a time when, according to historian Susan Rugh, the family car became a “home on the road... a cocoon of domestic space” in which families could feel safe to explore their country.

The trips 20th-century Americans took, to national parks and resorts and historic sites, generated a wealth of travelogues and other sources that often communicate far more about the traveler than the road taken. They can help us understand our own moment as well. Earlier this year, just 29 percent of Americans felt comfortable taking a commercial flight, but 84 percent were comfortable using their own vehicles for a road trip. During the pandemic, tourism suffered but road trips surged. Driving into the great outdoors again felt like a safe escape.

The Manuscript Division is full of road trip stories, not because it maintains specific road trip collections but because automobile travel has been so central to modern American life. Items in the division range from administrative records mapping out early guidebooks, to breathless

journals recounting shared adventures, to testimonials of discrimination faced at roadside gas stations, restaurants and hotels. Together, they tell the story not of one America, but of many.

Researchers can find in the papers of the Works Progress Administration the records of the American Guide Series, a Depression-era project to create richly textured guidebooks of all of America's states and major cities and some of its highways and waterways. The series generated 378 books and pamphlets altogether and employed subsequently celebrated authors like Richard Wright, Eudora Welty and Zora Neale Hurston.

The books were needed. Railroads, one of the 19th century's great symbols of modernity, had run along immovable tracks following set timetables. Rich and poor travelers alike were essentially reduced to pieces of baggage. Early automobiles promised a pathfinding freedom, but motorists found America's intercity roadways disjointed and virtually unmarked. Colossal early touring guides like the Automobile Blue Book prescribed tedious turn-by-turn directions through the maze, but offered little insight into local communities.

The WPA guides blended an attention to local history, culture and commerce with a literary sensibility. The project's ambition still startles. An early prospectus promised to advance efforts to “preserve national literacy and historic shrines, to exploit scenic wonders and to develop natural advantages such as mines and quarries.” Steinbeck later called the guides “the most comprehensive account of the United States ever got together.” Staffers, sometimes road-tripping to fact check their work, labored to create a nuanced, encyclopedic account of what mattered about America – one mapped out in routes Americans could drive for themselves.

■ **Opposite:** Journalist A.B. MacDonald put together this scrapbook of a road trip he took in 1938 with daughter Mary, who passed away shortly after their journey. *Manuscript Division*

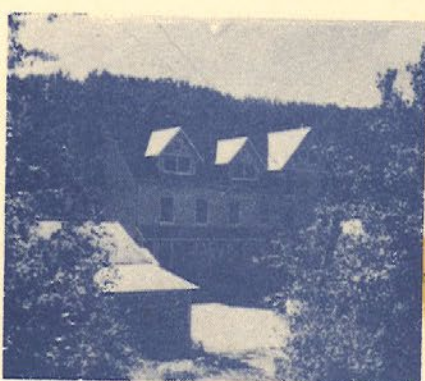
■ **Preceding pages:** The Apollo theater in Harlem (from left); an Alabama Crimson Tide football game; the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C.; the beach at Atlantic City; a home in Key West; the New York City skyline; and a food stand at the Colorado state fair. *Prints and Photographs Division*

reetings from



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Yet not all Americans traveled those routes with the same ease. The records of the NAACP, held by the Manuscript Division, contain hundreds of testimonials speaking to the uncertainties and humiliations Jim Crow-era African Americans faced when they ventured from home. For these motorists, the automobile's promise of freedom coexisted with segregated buses and trains and a range of limitations on their mobility. Black drivers experienced the open road, according to historian Cotten Seiler, as "both democratic social space and racial minefield." Automobiles seemed to offer a real escape from Jim Crow, but one that always lay just beyond the horizon.

As a result, excursions often turned sour. One letter, submitted in 1947 by a high school science teacher, details an afternoon road trip to a state park near Albany, "for the purpose of sightseeing and enjoying the natural beauty of the State of New York." When a hotel bartender within the park twice refused service to the teacher and a Jewish colleague, he insisted the hotel be "made to pay" for his "humiliation and damage to my pride." Similar testimonials, of injustices on buses and trains and at roadside stops, illustrate the road trip's unfulfilled promise for African American travelers. But they also suggest the allure of commanding one's own vehicle and of sidestepping more communal forms of transit.

Travelogues in collections of personal papers offer another dimension still, documenting both cosmopolitan tourism and nostalgic returns home. A travel journal in the papers of sociologist Rilma Oxley Buckman describes a footloose road trip from Indiana to Alaska, taken in 1950 with a Purdue colleague in a late model Nash. The "lady campers" had met in Yokohama just after the war, both working with the U.S. military. Adventuring their way north, they socialized and took snapshots. They noted the "Huckleberry Finn riverscapes" of Illinois and Alaskan roads "wobbly as a wagon trail." But their lives in Asia repeatedly intervened, from birds that resembled Korean magpies to

the Japan-like hot springs of the Canadian Rockies and then to worrying radio reports about the start of the Korean War.

A scrapbook made by journalist A.B. MacDonald recounts a road trip with his daughter Mary in 1938, just four years before he died. From Kansas City to his boyhood home in New Brunswick, father and daughter visit the old "homestead," drink at a roadside spring where the family once watered their horses and catch up with boyhood friends. Captions are written two years later in a shaky hand, from MacDonald's sickbed. By that time, Mary had tragically passed away. Above his recollections of an old schoolmate's home, whose bed of nasturtiums both had admired as a "perfect blanket of gold and crimson," two flowers just received by mail are pressed into the paper. There, MacDonald writes, "Later – I did put two of the flowers on Mary's grave, and there they remained for several weeks. She knew, of course she did."

And there are more. The Library's manuscript collections show suffragists embracing the automobile as a vehicle for women's liberation and activists like Sara Bard Field staging cross-country journeys to gain publicity for the cause. They show Carlos Montezuma, cofounder of the Society of American Indians, defending the rights of indigenous Americans to purchase automobiles without government permission and to travel as they please. We even find political satirist Art Buchwald in a comically overloaded Chrysler Imperial, on a 1958 road trip from Paris to Moscow in order to test whether such a drive can be made "without being arrested."

Road trips appear in unexpected places, and they can be revealing in unexpected ways. And in a nation knitted together with highways, cars long ago became Americans' liberating, frustrating, memory-making homes on the road.

–Josh Levy is a historian in the Manuscript Division.

■ **Opposite: In 1950, sociologist Rilma Oxley Buckman and a colleague drove a late model Nash from Indiana to Alaska and recorded their journey in this journal. Manuscript Division**



ON THE ROAD

AGAIN AND AGAIN

Over many miles and years, photographer Highsmith is taking a full-length portrait of America.

BY MARK HARTSELL



When Carol M. Highsmith first hit the road to photograph America, she couldn't know of the dozens of years, tens of thousands of photos and hundreds of thousands of miles that lay ahead.

For over three decades now, Highsmith has made it her mission to capture this country in all its great, messy, breathtaking, complicated glory – and to make her photos freely available to the public at the Library of Congress.

She owns a home, a nice Victorian just outside of Washington, D.C., that she shares with husband and traveling companion Ted Landphair, two cats and two kittens, Tater and Tot.

But they usually aren't there. As much as they love the place, home for Carol and Ted really is the road.

Some nine months of each year, they load up the SUV and head out there, somewhere – down a moss-draped avenue of oaks in

South Carolina, alongside a streetcar on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans, up to one of those towns out West where the altitude vastly exceeds the population. Silverton, Colorado: elevation, 9,318; population, 637.

Highsmith first realized the importance of chronicling America's culture and people in 1980, when she photographed the historic Willard Hotel, then in ruins, just blocks from the White House.

A developer was restoring the place by using historical photographs taken by Frances Benjamin Johnston in lieu of architectural drawings that couldn't be found. They had obtained the photos from the Library, so Highsmith went there to examine Johnston's work.

In the 1930s and '40s, Johnston had taken extensive photographs of antebellum architecture across the South for archiving at the Library. Highsmith saw those and knew right then that she wanted – no, had – to do the same thing, and more.

■ Mummers parade down Broad Street in Philadelphia, a tradition dating to 1901. Carol M. Highsmith Archive/ Prints and Photographs Division



■ Above: John Billings polishes one of the Grammy Awards he created in his basement in Ridgway, Colorado; Navajo Eula M. Atene holds her 3-month-old baby in Monument Valley. Carol M. Highsmith Archive/Prints and Photographs Division



"I realized what she had done and how valuable it was," Highsmith says. "I realized what I had to do. I didn't have a choice."

In the 1980s, she photographed states for a series of books published by Random House and, when that project finished, just kept going, traveling the U.S. and photographing what she saw.

Since 2010, she's been carrying out a project in collaboration with the Library and private sponsors to photograph each of the 50 states in depth – one of the largest one-person surveys of the country since the Depression-era work of photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Russell Lee for the Farm Security Administration.

Professional-quality, rights-free photos with sweeping coverage of contemporary life in a single state are difficult to find, despite the proliferation of photography on the internet. The project intends to create a much-needed record of America during the early 21st century, carefully preserved for the ages.

Like Johnston before her, Highsmith is archiving her photographs at the Library – so far, more than 70,000 across the decades. She also waived her rights to them; all are in the public domain, free for anyone to use.

America is always changing and evolving, and Highsmith wants to chronicle what's here now, before it's gone. Older buildings get torn down to make way for the new, lonely spots in the countryside become thriving suburbs, history happens and things change.

Indeed, two weeks after Highsmith photographed Big Tex, the 55-foot cowboy mascot of the Texas State Fair, he burned down. Last year, she went by The Mule trading post, a well-known stop along Route 66 in Missouri, only to find the place had closed permanently – a victim of the pandemic.

People think, "I'm sure things will always be the same," Highsmith says. "Well, they won't."



So, she gets it all: weathered tobacco barns and grand government buildings, kitschy motels and general stores from the heyday of Route 66, the swampy beauty of the Everglades and the stark grandeur of Monument Valley, and countless state fairs, mummers parades, stock shows and Mardi Gras (or, in an age of pandemic and social distancing, “Yardi Gras”).

She also captures the American people, hard-working, funny, quirky, playful.

A Florida dairy farmer strolls into a pasture in the evenings to serenade an audience of cows on his trombone. In tiny Ridgway, Colorado, a silver-haired gent sits in his basement and creates all of the golden statuettes presented to glamorous pop stars each year at the Grammys. In Kentucky, a couple decorates their property with discarded mannequins and dolls, creating their own land-of-misfit-toys roadside attraction, the Home for Wayward Babydolls.

“Because we’re free people, we think fun and interesting thoughts and do interesting

things,” Highsmith says. “Because we can do anything we want, can’t we?”

Highsmith is finishing six states this year, leaving 10 still to photograph.

So, for the next two to three years, she and Ted will pack the SUV with their gear – Highsmith uses an ultra-high-resolution, 151-megapixel camera – and hit the road again.

Ted drives, and Carol sits in back and edits the thousands of images she takes. They travel about 40,000 miles per year – a lot of miles and a lot of work, but it’s important. Highsmith wants her photographs to help wake people up to what America has, to realize it’s worth saving.

“It’s still just a great place, isn’t it? I burst with pride, knowing I’m an American,” she says. “There’s just something so golden about it that I really can’t put it into words, so I have to show you in photographs. I have to.”

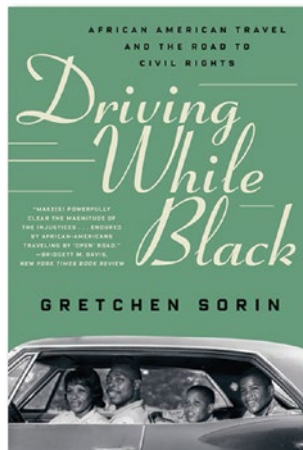
■ Above: a barge moves along a canal near Port Arthur, Texas; and a coyote blends into its surroundings in Yellowstone National Park. *Carol M. Highsmith Archive/Prints and Photographs Division*

SHOP



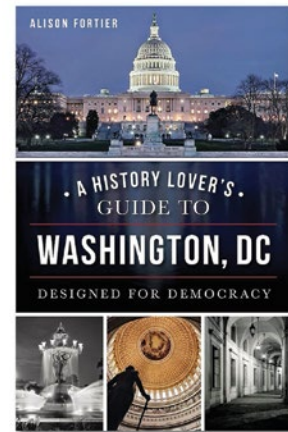
Open Book Dinnerware
Product # See website
Price: See website

Extend your love of books to tablescapes with this clever dinnerware in the shape of an open book. Features platters, dinner and dessert plates and cups and saucers.



'Driving While Black'
Product #21105914
Price: \$28.95

Gretchen Sorin recovers a lost history, demonstrating how, when combined with black travel guides, the automobile encouraged a new way of resisting oppression.



History Lover's Guide to D.C.
Product #21105707
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"A History Lover's Guide to Washington, D.C." goes beyond the traditional guidebook to offer a historical journey through the federal district.



Book Lover's Tea and Coffee
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Choose custom comforts with a hearty black tea blend or herbal hibiscus or a robust East Indies meets West Indies ground coffee blend that date to colonial America.



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Price: \$25

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LAST WORD

ROXANA ROBINSON

When you travel, you're on a different plane. Your own life has been put on pause. All the things that hold your attention at home have fallen away. You are now without yourself, floating like mist in someone else's landscape. You are an observer. Everything you see you must absorb.

When I arrived in Sweden I took a cab in from the airport. My driver was a friendly middle-aged Swedish man who spoke good English. When he heard this was my first visit, he appointed himself as my guide and explained what I was seeing. As we approached Stockholm, he pointed out a stone building.

"Here is a castle," he began. I looked at it obediently, but he stopped. "Not a castle." He struggled. "A palace."

Not a castle, a palace. I was fascinated. Many native English-speakers would have trouble explaining the difference between the two. (It's a question of fortification.)

He went on talking, but I stopped listening. I was marveling at his grasp of a foreigner's language, so precise and so sophisticated. Was this what Sweden was like? Was everyone here so well-educated, starting with cabdrivers? Was this socialism? I was dazzled. That was my first glimpse of Sweden, and that moment of graceful elucidation stays with me. Not a castle, a palace.

I went to Mongolia on a three-week riding trip across the steppes, with an English-speaking guide and an equestrian leader who spoke no English. He was an ex-Army general, and a brilliant rider. He knew that my friend Emily and I liked to race, and when we reached a flat space he would turn to us and say, "Nadaam!" That's the name of the national horse race, and this was the signal that we could bolt. He knew we wanted to gallop – all Mongolia loves to gallop. Genghis Khan created his empire with galloping horses. Our general had a beautiful rich voice, and often, as we crested a rise, or broke out of the woods, he would break into haunting, melodious song. Once I asked our guide what his song was about.

"We have only two subjects," he explained. "All our songs are about nature or love."

Mongolians traditionally worship the sky, a presence that is vast in a way that is hardly



BEOWULF SHEEHAN

imaginable elsewhere. You can't know what it's like until you stand beneath it and see how little there is of you. On my brave little horse, under that endless blue arch, I could see why these were the subjects they sang of: what was all around you, and what was inside your heart.

The way you encounter another country is visceral. You see the landscape – the handsome palace, that shocking blue – and you listen to the people. You see what their lives are like in ways you never imagined. I am awed by Swedish education. I am humbled by the Mongolian celebration of nature and the heart.

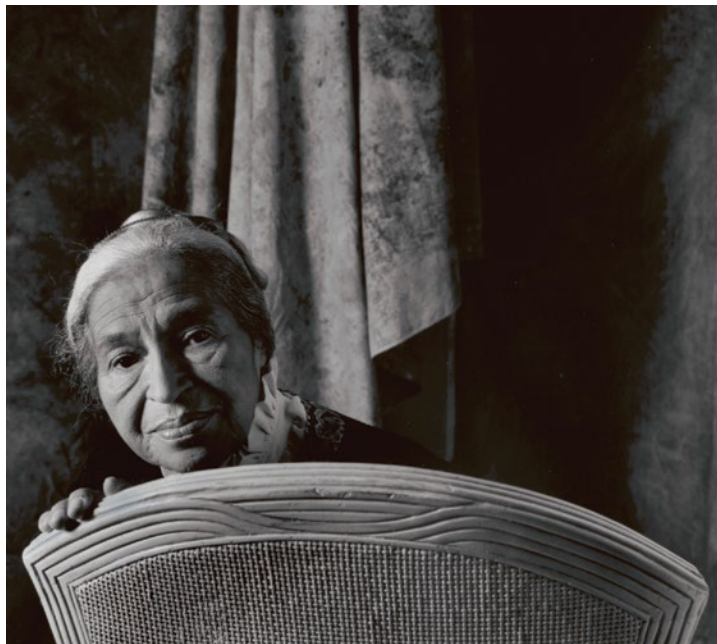
I can't truly know another culture, but I cherish these encounters. I cherish moments in which I'm brought face to face with another way of understanding the world.

—Roxana Robinson is the author of *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life* and novels such as *Cost*, *Sparta* and, most recently, *Dawson's Fall*.



■ An airborne pink Cadillac draws travelers to a food and fuel stop on Route 95 at Winchester, Idaho, in this photograph by John Margolies. *Prints and Photographs Division*

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS



ROSA PARKS: IN HER OWN WORDS

EXPLORING THE EARLY AMERICAS

SHALL NOT BE DENIED: WOMEN FIGHT FOR THE VOTE

Exhibitions reopening this summer; tickets for timed entry required

More information

loc.gov/exhibits

