



INSIDE:



Where EAST meets the Northwest

NEWS/STORIES/ARTICLES

[Book Reviews](#)

[Columns/Opinion/Cartoon](#)

[Films](#)

[International](#)

[National](#)

[NW/Local](#)

[Recipes](#)

[Special A.C.E. Stories](#)

[Online Paper \(PDF\)](#)

NW RESOURCE GUIDE

[Archives](#)

[Consulates](#)

[NW Job Market](#)

[Organizations](#)

[Scholarships](#)

[Special Sections](#)

Upcoming

[The Asian Reporter Twelfth](#)

[Annual Scholarship &](#)

[Awards Banquet -](#)

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[About Us](#)

[Advertising Info.](#)

[AR Merchandise](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Subscription Info. & Back](#)

[Issues](#)

[Readers Map on Frapper](#)

ASIA LINKS

[Asian Studies](#)

[Currency Exchange](#)

[More Asian Links](#)

[Public Holidays](#)

[Time Zones](#)



**BUMPY RIDE.** "Fasten Your Seat Belts — It's Been a Bumpy Ride," a bus tour exploring historic sites of discrimination in Portland, brings the past to life with its narrative on pertinent historical laws and events. Pictured is Portland artist Valerie Otani, a speaker on the tour, standing in front of one of the torii gates she designed to memorialize the site of a temporary holding facility for Japanese Americans forced to leave their homes due to Executive Order 9066 during World War II. (AR Photos/Julie Stegeman)



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From *The Asian Reporter*, V19, #36 (September 15, 2009), page 16.

### Bus tour journeys through Portland's discriminatory history

By Julie Stegeman

It's sometimes hard to imagine, while navigating through crowded city streets, the struggles of past Portlanders for civil rights. "Fasten Your Seat Belts — It's Been a Bumpy Ride," a bus tour exploring historic sites of discrimination in Portland, brings the past to life with its narrative on pertinent historical laws and events and speakers who were affected by them, all made more tangible by being on location.

The tour — offered by the Fair Housing Council of Oregon and the Lawyers' Campaign for Equal Justice — condenses the discrimination history of Portland and Oregon into a three-hour bus ride. Led by tour guide Diane Hess, education director of the Fair Housing Council, the bus ride covered events in Oregon history from the mid-1800s — when a series of exclusion laws was passed in Oregon to keep African Americans out of its borders — to the present.

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Historic events were offered in geographical, not chronological, order, skipping from year to year as the bus came to relevant sites.

One of the stops was the Portland Metropolitan Exposition Center, formerly known as the Pacific International Exposition Center, the site of a temporary holding facility for Japanese Americans — forced to leave their homes due to Executive Order 9066 during World War II — until long-term internment camps were constructed.

Portland artist Valerie Otani, standing in front of one of the *torii* gates she designed to commemorate the Japanese Americans who were held there, spoke about how this point in history affected Japanese Americans. Not only was there physical restriction during the internment, there was also loss of income and businesses, the freezing in 1942 of their assets which were inaccessible until 1955 — well after the end of the war — and the eroding of relationships, within the community as well as within families.

Tour participants learned about the 1886 and 1887 attacks on Chinese by mobs in Portland, Oregon City, Albina, Mount Tabor, and Guilds Lake; the 1882 Federal Chinese Exclusion Act that prevented Chinese immigration; the 1919 Portland Realty Board Code of Ethics, which until 1952 banned its members from selling property in white neighborhoods to people of color, fearing they would depress property values; and many other acts of discrimination.

The bus also drove to PGE Park, formerly known as Civic Stadium, a rally site for the KKK during its peak time in Oregon, the 1920s, and to the area surrounding the Multnomah Athletic Club, which used to house the Portland Chinese Garden Community's terraced gardens until the Chinese were gradually pushed out because "they were in the way of progress." An innocent-looking corner on the bus route was the site of a well-known hate crime in 1988, the murder of Ethiopian immigrant Mulugeta Seraw by three racist skinheads.

Not all of the tour sites had negative histories. The bus stopped at the former location of the city of Vanport, where Ed Washington, a one-time resident, gave a talk about his experiences growing up there. He described how the city was constructed in 1942 as public housing for Henry Kaiser's shipyard employees and that, although the housing itself was segregated, the schools were integrated and the city was the first in Oregon to hire African-American teachers. Disaster struck Vanport in 1948, when a cataclysmic flood wiped out the entire city, leaving residents homeless. The city was never rebuilt.

A modern-day example of housing integration was seen at New Columbia in north Portland, a mixed-income community that includes public housing, rentals, senior housing, and privately owned homes.

Interspersed among the stories of historical events, attorneys from the Campaign for Legal Justice offered insight on current-day discrimination, much of it related to unfair housing practices and exploitation of immigrant workers, who are sometimes unaware of their rights or threatened with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement when attempting to exercise those rights.

The tour also touched upon the worrisome increase in hate crimes since 2000 — in part due to the recession, the election of President Obama, and the immigration debate — citing several recent examples in Oregon.

If, as philosopher and poet George Santayana says, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," then "Fasten Your Seat Belts — It's Been a Bumpy Ride" is an excellent vehicle for achieving a brighter future for Portland.

To learn more, or to schedule a tour, visit <[www.fhco.org/tours.htm](http://www.fhco.org/tours.htm)>.