

On the Bus with the Cast of *Clybourne Park*

Posted by Kinsley Suer | 19 March 2013 | Comments (0)

Last week, the cast of *Clybourne Park* as well as several PCS staff members went on the [Fair Housing Council of Oregon's](#) Tour of Portland's Hidden Discriminatory History. The fascinating and enlightening bus tour of Portland focused on the rather sad history of our city's discrimination and displacement of minorities. Did you know that there was a time when Oregon was known as the most discriminatory state north of the Mason Dixie Line? Until 1926, it was illegal for African Americans to live in Oregon, which was home to more than 70,000 Ku Klux Klan members. "Sun-down laws" prevented Asians and African Americans from even staying overnight in many cities. While these cruel facts are now history, it's a history that has been forgotten by many. Since 2008, the Fair Housing Council of Oregon has organized tours of the city to teach residents and visitors about Oregon's history of discrimination and honor its victims.

Although *Clybourne Park* takes place in Chicago, it could have easily been set in any city in America, including many neighborhoods right here in Portland. The tour provided the perfect opportunity for the cast to view the production through a local lens, and explore the history of the city that they'll be calling home for the next few months.

Education Director Diane Hess was the guide and narrator of the tour, explaining some of the history of housing discrimination in Oregon as we drove around the city. As she talked, Diane passed around historic photos and copies of real estate manuals from Oregon. The photo on the right shows a ranking of races and nationalities, organized by their perceived impact on real estate values, that was used from the 1920s through the 1940s. We also learned that, in 1919, the Portland Board of Realtors drafted a Code of Ethics. It dictated that if a realtor rented to a minority, the realtor would be expelled from the board.



One of the most interesting things I learned was that the Fair Housing Act passed 45 years ago, only one week after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The act passed in April, which is why that month is Fair Housing Month. It's also the month that we'll open *Clybourne Park*, making the timing of the production feel particularly appropriate.

In the photo below Director Chris Coleman, Stage Manager Jeremy Eisen, and cast members Brianna Horne and Gavin Hoffman gather with other tour attendees to listen to one of our first guest speakers, Ed Washington.



One of our early stops was in north Portland, at the site of what was once the city of Vanport. Ed Washington, former Metro Counselor, lived in Vanport as a child and witnessed the flood of 1948 that ravaged what was, at the time, the state's second largest city. His family moved to Vanport during WWII to find work in the Kaiser Shipyards near Portland. Vanport was the largest public housing project in the country and a relatively integrated community for the time. Located on the floodplains of the Columbia River, Vanport was home to 40,000 people when it was destroyed, 40% of whom were African American.



Our next stop was at the art installations near the MAX stop at the Portland Expo Center. Valerie Otani is the local artist who created the traditional Japanese gates on permanent display to memorialize the 1942 Japanese internment camp that was

located there. Valerie spoke about her family's experiences as Japanese Americans during WWII; her family was relocated from the San Francisco Bay Area and Hawaii during the war.

By hearing personal reflections from Ed and Valerie, we were able to experience discrimination from the victims' own perspectives.



After Pearl Harbor, Portland proclaimed that it would be the first U.S. city to rid itself of Japanese. More than 3,700 Japanese Americans were housed at the Expo Center in 1942. To commemorate them, Valerie's traditional Japanese gates were embellished with 3,700 tags that resemble the ones that were given to each person held within the Expo Center. In addition, metal surrounding the wooden gates was covered with newspaper articles from the 1940s. In the middle photo below, Production Assistant Kelsey Daye Lutz and cast members Brianna Horne and Sal Viscuso read the headlines of some of the articles.



We also heard from Randy Blazak, a professor in the Sociology Department at Portland State and chair of the Coalition Against Hate Crimes. Randy was doing an undercover study of racist skinheads in Florida when Mulugeta Seraw was

murdered here in Portland in 1988. The murder shocked the country and exposed SE Portland's significant population of skinheads.



After unloading back at Portland Center Stage, the group headed up to the rehearsal hall for lunch and a discussion about what we had seen and experienced on the tour. Several people shared personal stories about their experiences with housing discrimination here in Oregon, including *Oregonian* theater critic Marty Hughley and Charlotte Rutherford, who grew up here in Portland and whose parents [were actively involved](#) in the civil rights movement. Her father was president of the Portland Chapter of the NAACP in the 1950s. The Portland Chapter, formed in 1914, is the oldest chapter west of the Mississippi.



[Clybourne Park](#) runs April 6 - May 5 at Portland Center Stage.