



Discussion Questions
Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet
by Jamie Ford

1. How were the daily realities and lives of the Japanese who were interned, and those that knew and loved them, affected by WWII policies? Discuss the interplay between personal and political spheres.
2. Oscar Holden & The Midnight Blue's record "The Alley Cat Strut" was referred to by his son as Henry's "Holy Grail," but had significance to the rest of the community, as well. How did Oscar respond to the raid on the Black Elks Club, and what examples do we have of marginalized communities standing in solidarity together today?
3. Henry's father had not been allowed into Japantown as a young person, and he also forbade Henry to enter it. Discuss Henry's father's loyalty to China and the roots of tension between the Chinese and Japanese communities. What are contemporary examples of such microcosms of international conflicts? What should be done, if anything, to bring reconciliation to diaspora communities at odds with one another?
4. At the train station, Keiko's father says, "You just gave me hope, Henry."..."And sometimes hope is enough to get you through anything" (p.134). Discuss ways in which individuals took actions, both large and small, on behalf of Japanese neighbors, friends, and family throughout the book.
5. What purpose does Henry's "I am Chinese" button serve? Discuss misperceived and forced identity and other examples of visual identifiers to denote a particular social or ethnic group. What were the human rights implications or consequences in these situations?
6. Henry tells his son at one point: "Some things just can't be fixed" (p. 268). What kind of apology or reparations are appropriate after the human rights violations experienced by the Japanese and others sent to internment camps? Do you think that the U.S. response has been adequate? (Some repayments were made in 1948, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 gave an apology and \$20,000 to living citizens or LPRs who were interned, and a subsequent lawsuit settlement issued \$5,000 to Japanese individuals living in Latin America who were brought to the United States.)
7. What was the significance and symbolism of the Panama Hotel, "a place between worlds...a place between times" (p. 62) – a place "on the corner of bitter and sweet" – for Henry and immigrant communities in Seattle?
8. How does the U.S. response to the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 and the "War on Terror" compare with the response during WWII? What are appropriate war-time responses? How do we understand and uphold non-derogable rights (fundamental/can never be suspended) during collective national panic or the chaos of war?
9. Henry is confused about why no Japanese families had returned to the Panama Hotel for their possessions. Ms. Pettison reflects that "Sometimes that's the best thing to do – to live in the present" (p. 64). How does an individual move forward after an experience like being interned? How has history informed our present?