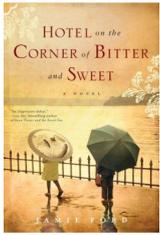


Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet



[view in catalog](#)

On November 17, author Jamie Ford speaks at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater in Bloomington for the NEA Big Read and the library's biennial Power of Words program.

As he often does, Jamie Ford writes about the clashing and melding of different cultures in his three historical novels: *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, *Songs of Willow Frost*, and *Love and Other Consolation Prizes*.

In *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, Ford presents a tender love story of two children, each from a minority community during WWII. We first meet Henry, the twelve-year old only child of parents born in China. His father, a leader in Seattle's Chinese community, spends his free time tracking the battles that Japan wages in China.

[jamie-ford-buskirk-crowd.jpg](#)

Henry's parents force him to attend an almost all-white school on scholarship: they desperately want him to become "an American." To this end, when Henry turns twelve, his father refuses to let him speak Cantonese at home. But as neither of his parents speak English, this puts a dent in family communication, and leaves Henry feeling lonely and isolated. To make matters worse, bullies at school beat Henry up nearly every day, though he does get a partial reprieve by serving lunch next to the caustic but caring Mrs. Beatty, the cafeteria supervisor.

One day, a young Japanese, girl, Keiko, joins Henry on the serving line. The two draw together, and Henry soon protectively walks Keiko home after school. He shares with her his intense love for jazz and his friendship with Sheldon, a black street busker from the American South who recognizes prejudice and racial abuse all too well. Before long, Henry asks Keiko in Japanese, "How are you today, beautiful?" But even as they grow closer, sharing an innocent kiss, around them war-flamed racial hatred grows. Henry's father insists that the young man wear a pin that says, "I am American?"; in Nihonmachi (Seattle's Japan town), shopkeepers post signs reading "American-owned." Yet nothing stops the anti-Japanese sentiment.

Soon, President Franklin Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066, allowing military leaders to designate "military areas" that exclude from them whomever they chose. Consequently, one day Henry sees a long line of people forced to march to the train station—the first large group of Japanese interns under the new law.

Keiko gives Henry her family's photograph albums and asks him to save them for her, creating a crisis at home for him when his parents discover them. He must choose between the family that raised him and his friend's Japanese-American family, who are shortly removed to Puyallup, the Washington State Fair site, where they sleep in former horse stalls.

This moving novel shows the evil governments can do during wartime, pitting ethnic group against ethnic group. It's also a father and son novel, a young love story, and a homage to that unpredictable musical art, jazz. A fine book.

Read *Hotel at the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, then come hear what the author, a Chinese-American himself, shares about its history, and his process of writing it.

Posted by Dory L. on November 8, 2017

[For the Love of Reading](#)

[American History](#)

[Coming of Age](#)

[Family Relationships](#)

[Fiction](#)

Multicultural

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet: A Novel
