

Preface

An antique tractor swings from a crane into the bowels of the 7-acre Simplot compound rising between Myrtle and Front streets in downtown Boise. Jack's Urban Meeting Place, or JUMP, features 52 turn-of-the-century tractors; also classrooms, roof gardens, an amphitheater, a recording studio, a dance studio, and a five-story tubular slide. Only once, in the lobby, does JUMP tribute its founder, but J. R. Simplot is ever-present. Jack's tractors recall the agrarian roots of Idaho's industrialization. JUMP also embodies the American romance of farm boys from humble beginnings who made more money than they knew how to spend.

JUMP's crane shadows the freight yard where risk-takers of another sort once labored for the Oregon Short Line. Young men from Japan who emigrated via Hawaii slept in company boxcars. To the south near the river's floodplain were blacks and dark Europeans in a "colored town" of Jim Crow housing. Nearby, along Front and Grove, were flophouses that boarded young women abandoned by spouses and boyfriends. Mothers with infants found cots in the county poor farms. Others became sex workers in Levy's Alley in saloons like the Bucket of Blood. Soundless, faceless, their backstreets lost to high-rise hotels and banks, they were Boiseans too common to be seen from the towers.

"All things, it is said, are duly recorded . . . but not quite," said Harlem's Ralph Ellison in a 1952 novel about socially invisible men. "What did they [the historians] ever think of us transitory ones? . . . Birds of passage who were too obscure for learned classification, too silent for the most sensitive recorders of sound?"

Admittedly it is hard to track misfortune. *Boise: An Illustrated History* (2000), the standard text, pictures an Athens emerging from sagebrush—vibrant, inclusive, polite. Fully a third of the book is a tribute to business leaders. Likewise, in Carol MacGregor's 2006 study of the frontier city, "charity" and "capitalist values" made Boise a prosperous hub. No matter the hostility to organized labor and tax-funded social programs. Class bias disconnects the culture of wealth from the plight of the bottom rung.



JUMP: IDAHO AIRSHIPS, INC.; JAPANESE RAILROAD WORKERS: DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Other Idahoans tells alternative stories. Each essay features a hard-labor location: a poor farm, a graveyard, a prison camp, a prison ward, a gold mine, a farm community, and a grid of minority housing. We close with an underside driving tour of 24 historic places. All worthy of landmark status, they are lessons at odds with the fables that wealth inspires.

In the shadow of Simplot, JUMP rises over the rail yards where immigrants from Japan laid track for the Oregon Short Line.

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