

# Painting the City White – A Walking Tour in the Shadows of Vancouver

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Course Project for PLAN 508 Fall 2017

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## 1- Modern Vancouver – Granville St. at West Georgia St.

Welcome to the first stop of this walking tour. You are now standing at the intersection of Granville and Georgia street. This intersection is one of the busiest in Downtown and it is a central hub for Vancouver’s entertainment, transportation and social life. Granville Street has been the soul of modern Vancouver ever since the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) built their terminus station at Coal harbour. In present days, you can see the Canada Line Vancouver City Center Station and the multinational technology giant – Microsoft’s new building at the southwest corner; then in the northeast corner still stands the grand old colonial style building of the Hudson Bay’s Company. Thousands of people from various cultural and social backgrounds, including tourists, local residents and office workers walk past here every day. You can feel the harmony of Vancouver’s past and present, and sense the impact of modernization, urbanization and globalization all here at one intersection. What you see here is a common image that describes current Vancouver as a city.

This is where we will begin our story, walking from what represents the city’s “present” to the forgotten “past” that only exist in the shadows and edges of the official history. Please walk east down West Georgia Street and turn left (north) on Beatty Street until you reach Dunsmuir Street.



## 2- Modern Vancouver – Beatty St. at Dunsmuir St.

You are now standing at the north east corner of Beatty Street and Dunsmuir Street where the Dunsmuir viaduct enters the downtown peninsula. Chinatown-Stadium Skytrain station should be right beside you and beneath it runs Vancouver’s first and oldest skytrain line – the Expo line, which opened in 1986 and named after the World Expo ’86 that was held in the city that year. It was a celebration and a milestone for the city as it was the first rapid transit line. It was a symbol of modernization, of advanced technology and an indication of more urban growth in a futuristic Vancouver. If you look east you will see the Dunsmuir viaduct, False creek and the remnant of what was going to be the Freeway that would have cut through Downtown Vancouver – the Georgia Viaduct. Remember the scene you see here as we will be comparing this image of a “futuristic Vancouver” with a certain untold past. Please continue walking north down Beatty Street and turn right (east) on West Pender Street until you reach Taylor Street.



## 3- Chinatown – West Pender St. at Taylor St.

If you look back up West Pender Street from the direction you came, you will notice something on the ground that crossed the existing road. It is the old railway track that was used frequently during the early days after the new city was built. To the east you will see the Millennium Gate, the entrance to historic Chinatown. This point is significant because this is where the city was divided historically; with the white elite European settlers on the west side of this street, and the unpleasant settlement of the working class ethnic minorities on the east, specifically the Chinese railway workers.

Despite that Vancouver is now praised for its multiculturalism, it was in fact a city built on segregation and racism. Similarly, although Chinatown is now a tourist attraction, most people don’t know that the early existence of Chinatown was completely based on racial discrimination. Before Vancouver was even a city, many Chinese

workers were recruited to build the railway that would eventually end in the city. They were paid much lower than the white workers and did the most dangerous jobs and many died. However, after the last spike was hammered, the Chinese workers were abandoned. With no work and little money to return home, they were forced to settle in the edge of the new city.

In a way official planning never happened in early Chinatown because elite European settlers would never set foot in what they condemned as a filthy, overcrowded, unhygienic slum. Historically False creek was also a lot bigger and the water reaches current day Clark Drive; therefore Chinatown was sitting on swamp land making it very risky and vulnerable for any built infrastructures. Yet the Chinese people built a community in an undesirable and confined space, which through many struggles survived until now. Please continue walking east on West Pender Street until you past Carrall Street and stop at the entrance of Dr. Sun Yet-sen Garden.



#### 4- Chinatown – West Pender St. between Carrall & Columbia St.

Pender Street was called Dupont Street back in the days, and it was where most activities were concentrated in old Chinatown. If you stand at the side of Dr. Sun Yet-sen Garden and look across the road, along the street you can still see some of the historical buildings from the past including the Yue Shan Society. Many benevolent associations and brotherhood societies were built along Dupont Street and East Hastings Street, where Chinese-Canadians can come together and support each other and their families.

Chinatown had its problems, it was once a red light district with lots of brothels and gambling and opium trade, yet it was a growing and thriving community in its own way. The city government had long ignored Chinatown and made no effort to improve the area, but the Chinese-Canadians built their own community and lived under the city's shadows. Within the first few decades of Chinatown, Chinese people witnessed and experienced the 1907 Anti-oriental violence, 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act, 1930s great depression, 1940s WWII and many other significant historical events. Nonetheless, they built theatres, schools, a hospital and a library...it was a self-contained neighbourhood that survived some of the darkest era without any major official planning in place.

Unfortunately most of the old Chinatown is now gone and what remained are untold stories and some of its historical buildings. This is evident as you continue to walk along the then Dupont street (Pender Street), and you will see new buildings squeezing the old buildings beside them. What you are observing is the process of

gentrification. As newer and wealthier Chinese immigrants choose to move to Richmond, older and poorer Chinatown residents are being displaced by increasing rental and living cost in the area. You will notice some fancy bars and trendy coffee shops along with old under-repaired Chinese groceries stores and restaurants. This is Chinatown today, where only selected buildings are preserved as a type of “recognition”, yet the heritage and stories are lost through urban renewal and new middle class residents moving in. Please continue to walk down Pender Street and turn right (south) on Main Street until you reach Union Street.



#### 5- Hogan's Alley – Union St. between Main St. & Gore Ave

In front of you is what you saw earlier, the Georgia & Dunsmuir Viaduct. Can you imagine what was this piece of land like around 60 years ago? Can you picture a thriving community living right on the land where these concrete bridges now stand? This area you see on Union Street was part of the original neighbourhood of Vancouver's first concentrated African-Canadian community – Hogan's Alley. The small black neighbourhood used to run between Union and Prior Streets from approximately Main Street to Jackson Avenue. As you can see now, no trace of Hogan's Alley existence remained. It was completely demolished in the 1970s by the Non-Partisan Association civic government's construction of the Georgia Viaduct, which was intended to be the first phase of a freeway that would cut through Chinatown, Gastown and Downtown Vancouver. Writer and the co-founder of the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project, Wayde Compton once said in an interview, "It was the moment that car culture was hitting North America and people were supposed to live in the suburbs and work in the cities. They needed to put freeways through, so invariably they targeted black neighbourhoods or Chinatowns, and in Vancouver it was both. Putting a highway right on top of this small black community was an example of institutional racism, targeting the community that they thought could least oppose them."

The top-down planning process and the need for the city's “average population” destroyed and displaced this small black community, along with the unique heritage and culture they carry. This should have been a significant event in Vancouver's planning history, but Hogan's Alley name and story are extremely foreign to most Vancouverites. Immerse yourself in the environment: listen to the noises of cars running on the viaduct drowning the voices of the African-Canadian people that used to live here. Once you're finished, please walk to Gore Avenue and turn left (north) until you reach East Pender Street. Turn right (east) and continue walking down Pender Street and stop at Dunlevy Avenue.



## 6- Strathcona – East Pender St. at Dunlevy Ave.

You may have noticed the transition into a more residential area as you walk past Gore Avenue and stopped at Dunlevy Avenue. This is the indication that you have left Chinatown and entered the Strathcona neighbourhood. Around you should see many co-operative housing, where people buy into a share of the building rather than being a sole owner. This required some communal responsibilities from all residents and helped people build a sense of community. There is also a Chinese senior home along this street, which is an implication of Chinese-Canadian communities living in Strathcona. In earlier days, Strathcona was home to mostly Eastern European Railway workers. However, during the 1950s an increasing number of Chinese people moved into the area due its proximity to Chinatown and affordable housing price. Nearly half the residents were Chinese-Canadians by the end of the decade making Strathcona an unofficial extension of Chinatown. Like Chinatown, Strathcona was also underdeveloped with many of its structure suffering from inadequate constructions and poor interior conditions. Strathcona quickly become one of the city's major redevelopment projects, but it was also under the danger of being demolished to clear way for the new proposed freeway.

The demolition plan was announced without any consultation with the local communities and it made people very frightened and angry. Ms. Mary Lee Chan was one of residents that lived in Strathcona, and in 1968 she stepped up and started organizing people in the neighbourhood and formed the Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association (SPOTA). She knocked on people's doors and led many fund-raising events which eventually got the support of the federal minister of housing and the destruction of Strathcona stopped. This was one of the very important grassroot movements in the planning history of Vancouver that saved Strathcona and Chinatown from the destiny of Hogan's Alley. It was the first time in the city that non-white citizen voices were heard loud and clear. Please continue down East Pender Street until you reach Princess Avenue.



## 7- Strathcona – East Pender St. at Princess St.

At this corner of Strathcona you may have realized how drastically the scenscape has changed. If you recall earlier in Chinatown, same pattern also occurred as you walk along the street. Like Chinatown, Strathcona is undergoing some rapid gentrification at an even larger scale. Strathcona has always been a changing community, but the ones living here were always working class families because of the affording housing price. You should see the Strathcona Church standing right in front you on the northeast corner of this intersection. This Church is a great example of the “invasion-succession” process that characterized this neighbourhood. In the earlier days it was run by Eastern European worker groups such as the Swedish Lutheran Church, Greek Orthodox and later Ukrainian Catholic Church. Then as the East Europeans moved south to more desirable places in the city, the Chinese community poured in and the church served the ethnic Chinese-Canadian Catholic community. Now, it is home to a collective of Christian ministries in Strathcona, Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside.

Today, this is the heart of Strathcona as the Strathcona Community Centre and Lord Strathcona Community School are located right across the street. Despite all the shifts in local ethnic groups, Strathcona has always been an organic and vibrant neighbourhood of the working class people; but with all the current gentrification process going on, the demographic of this area is once again changing. It is hard to imagine what would Strathcona be like in 10 years, but it is certain that housing prices are rising in this once affordable working class community, and younger middle class people are moving in. What would happen to the co-operative housing? What would be the new dynamics of this community? Should the government step in to stop gentrification or completely redevelop the area once again? These are questions worth thinking. Please turn left (north) up Princess Avenue and turn right (west) on East Cordova Street until you reach the southeast corner of Oppenheimer Park. If you feel comfortable, I would encourage you to walk straight through the park diagonally and experience what is happening in this area. Please also respect the local people using the area while you walk through. Stop at the northwest corner of Oppenheimer Park on Powell Street at Dunlevy Avenue.



## 8- Japantown – Powell St. at Dunlevy Ave

Oppenheimer Park was named after the Oppenheimer Brothers, and David Oppenheimer was the city of Vancouver's second mayor. This area has always been a place of social protest and gatherings, the most recent one being occupied by homeless people as tent city in 2014; but they were later evicted by the Vancouver Police Department. Many people might not feel comfortable in this area because the downtown eastside is known for drug addictions and homelessness. However, for local people in the area, this is a space where they can socialize and feel safe. Please respect their space as you observe the area and do not take actions that would make them feel uncomfortable.

If you stand here with the park behind you, what's in front is once the central street of "Little Tokyo" – Vancouver's old Japantown. Like Hogan's Alley, Japantown has completely vanished and barely anything left reminds people of the Japanese Community that used to live here. It was also under attack during the 1907 Anti-oriental violence, but later on it did not survive like Chinatown because of the hostility against Japanese people during WWII. Their properties were taken away from them and the BC government sent the Japanese people to internment camps across the province. Some Japanese-Canadians returned to this community after the war, but nothing was left for them and they never got their properties back. The only remnants of the Japanese Neighbourhood are the "boom town" houses that you see along Powell Street. They were built right after the big fire of 1886, and were homes to some of the 9000 Japanese-Canadian community that once lived here.

You would also notice in this corner a mural on the ground that says "Powell Street Grounds" and a monument commemorating the Japanese-Canadian Baseball Team – Vancouver Asahi. During the dark days of anti-oriental racism and oppression, the Vancouver Asahi baseball team won many games playing against tall big white players, and Oppenheimer Park was once their practice ground. They would have been a rising star of the baseball teams, but their dreams were soon crushed when the Japanese community was sent away into war camps. Since 1977, the Powell Street Festival takes place in this area every year to celebrate the history and culture of the Japanese-Canadian people, and to bring the forgotten history back into light. Please continue west down Powell Street and turn right (north) onto Main Street. Walk up to the waterfront and follow the curved bridge path to CRAB park.

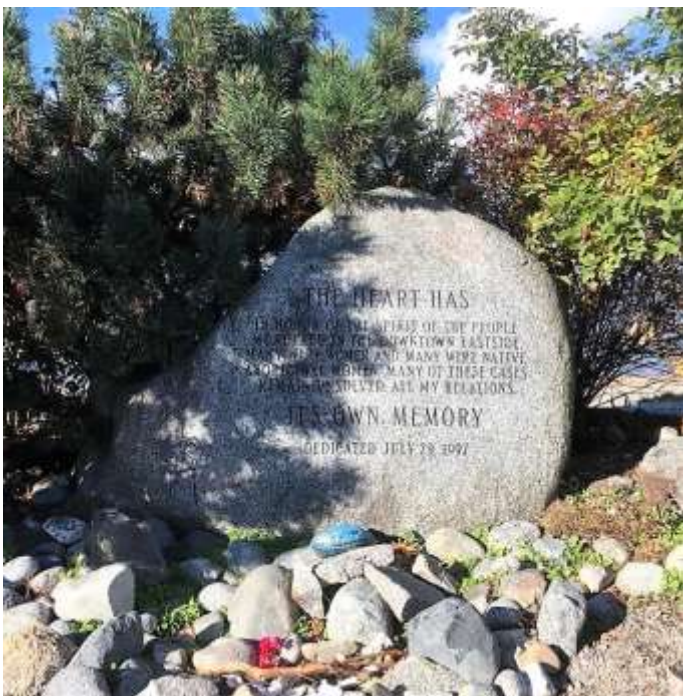


## 9- An Indigenous Memory – CRAB Park at Portside

CRAB is actually an acronym for a campaign that was “to Create a Real and Accessible Beach”. The space was created to be a haven for the people and nature around this park. If you followed the bridge path and then walked along the waterfront of CRAB Park, you may notice a small stone memorial on the right side of the walkway. This memorial is to honour the spirits of many women, particularly indigenous women that were murdered or went missing in the Downtown Eastside. Every year on February 14<sup>th</sup>, there is a march where the community, friends, family members of the missing women along with activists and the public would come together and walk along Downtown Eastside and end at this memorial. This is also our last stop of this walking tour, but it is not the end of our reflection.

You have walked on, and are currently standing on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Coast Salish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations people. Look out to the ocean and immerse yourself in the natural environment of the Burrard Inlet. Imagine the first time when the First Nations people saw Captain George Vancouver’s ships sailing into their traditional land. The European “discovery” of the land that is now Vancouver, was also the beginning of a never ending nightmare for the Indigenous people. Once the city was founded, they were confined into small reserves and isolated from their traditional land. Even then, many of the reserves and properties were forcibly taken away from the indigenous people, such as the reserves situated on Musqueam, Kitsilano and Stanley Park land. The city saw those lands as valuable development sites for the better future of the people of Vancouver; but who are the people of Vancouver? Who are the communities with power and voices? What kind of struggles and pain have indigenous people been going through since they are separated from their very own land and communities? We should never forget that there was already a city before the city.

Lastly, think again about the creation of Vancouver and think about who benefited and who are silenced in this process. Reflect back on the whole walking and think about the disappearing communities and invisible people that lived and are still living in the shadows of this city. These geographically concentrated areas, such as Chinatown, Japantown and Hogan’s Alley, were built because of the city’s planning decisions that physically create segregation and discrimination; but within these neighbourhoods were thriving communities that created their own havens in a city that was painted white. I hope this walking tour will help facilitate conversations among people and help you think critically about the official Vancouver planning history you know.





## About this Project

The official history of Vancouver as a city is now 131 years old since it was incorporated in 1886. Urbanization and modernization has drastically changed the region over decades. Many of the city's early planning decisions such as the design of the grid system, preserving large urban green space and developing a transit focused transportation network has been praised to impact what Vancouver is like today. In addition, Vancouver is recognized as one of the most sustainable and multicultural cities in North America. However, beneath all the glory there are people and communities that lived and are still living under the shadow of this city. The city's early history was built upon racial discrimination, segregation and oppression. Vancouver was a city painted white by the elite European settlers that came with the CPR railway. Many stories were untold or glossed over in the city's official history, and most Vancouverites never knew what was hidden under the shadow. This inspired me to do an interactive map and a walking tour as a project for my Planning Theory Course PLAN 508 at the School of Community and Regional Planning.

I am very passionate about this project because many of the stories I tell in this walking tour is based on what I personally researched and heard from people. Dr. Leonie Sandercock's book "Making the Invisible Visible" (1998) had a strong influence of how I framed the concept and structure behind this project. 3 years ago I was a student researcher for the Vancouver City Planning Commission's Chronology project. During this process I learned a lot about the city's planning history, both its glory and dark side. My job as a student researcher was to identify what are the important planning decisions and events that could be considered as a milestone to the city. Many students were involved and over 3 months we gathering intensive amount of information on all the planning related events that happened. This chronology project is now an online interactive timeline that shows the milestones of Vancouver's planning history. However, what is surprising to me in this experience is how certain events are being undermined or in the case of Hogan's Alley, not at all presented in the final timeline. It seems like the celebration of Vancouver's planning milestones tells an "official history" that excludes certain communities and stories that lived in the shadows of the city. They are probably not significant enough to be considered as "milestones", or events that the city wish people would not focus on. This is why I decided to bring some these stories back into the light through this walking tour.

Ideally I would like this project to be an audio walking tour where people have to physically be at each reflection point to trigger the oral story telling process. Unfortunately due to technical limits and time constraint, I have chosen to do the walking tour as an online interactive map for the purpose of my planning theory course. Nonetheless, with the support of geospatial visualization tools, I was able to be more creative with my concept elements. For example, I intentionally used an all-black basemap of Vancouver to allude how marginalized ethnic minorities felt living under the city's shadow; additionally, the black basemap is a bold contrast to the title "Painting the City White". I also wanted to utilize digital technology such as this interactive map to make it more accessible to the larger public and younger generations; I wish to show that technology if used carefully and correctly can empower citizens and their history. This project will hopefully continue beyond the course and I might add more reflection points while transforming it onto an audio based platform. I truly hope that people will take this map out and actually walk along the tour route while reading the very few stories I present at each reflection points. I wish that this walking tour will facilitate discussions among people who chose to do it and help us reflect on an alternative official history of Vancouver.

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## **Online Resources (All accessed in October 2017)**

- David See-Chai Lam Centre for International Communication at Simon Fraser University – “*A Brief Chronology of Chinese Canadian History – From Segregation to Intergration*”: <https://www.sfu.ca/chinese-canadian-history/index.html>
- Hogan’s Alley Memorial Project: <http://hogansalleyproject.blogspot.ca/>
- Powell Street Festival Society: <http://www.powellstreetfestival.com/about/history/>
- The History of Metropolitan Vancouver: [http://www.vancouverhistory.ca/archives\\_strathconaSaved.htm](http://www.vancouverhistory.ca/archives_strathconaSaved.htm)
- Vancouver City Planning Commission Online Chronology Project: <http://chronology.vancouverplanning.ca/chronology/>