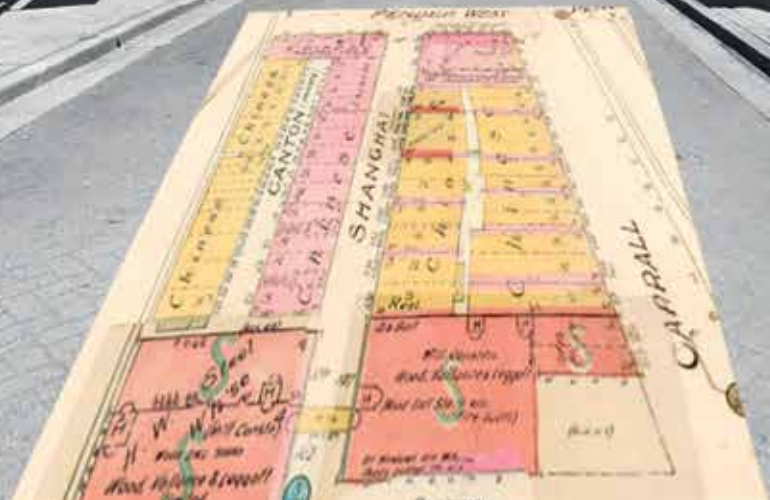


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WHITE RIOT

**The 1907 Anti-Asian
Riots in Vancouver**

HENRY TSANG



ARSENAL PULP PRESS
VANCOUVER

WHITE RIOT

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►
Southeast corner of Hastings Street
and Columbia Street after anti-Asian
riots of 1907. | University of British
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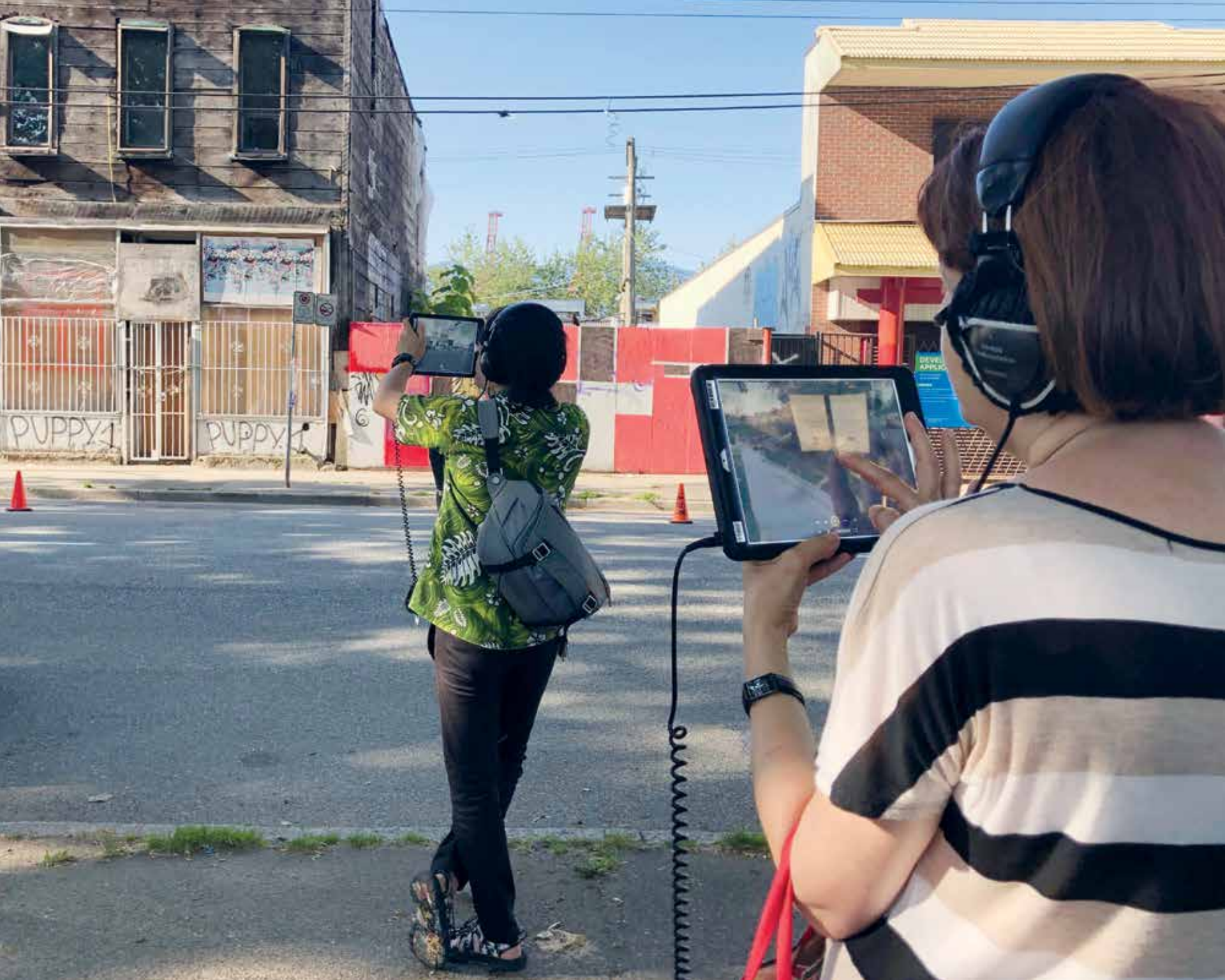


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Introduction

HENRY TSANG

White Riot: The 1907 Anti-Asian Riots in Vancouver is based on *360 Riot Walk*, a 360 video walking tour that traces the history and route of the mob that attacked the Chinese Canadian and Japanese Canadian communities following the demonstration and parade organized by the Asiatic Exclusion League in Vancouver. Participants are led into the social and political environment of the time, where racialized communities were targeted through legislated acts, as well as physical acts of exclusion and violence.

The interactive tour can be accessed on any web browser via the site 360riotwalk.ca—on location with a mobile device such a smartphone or tablet, or remotely on a desktop computer. The soundtrack is available in four languages spoken by the local residents at the time: English, Cantonese, Japanese, and Punjabi. Each voice-over includes an introduction in Skw̓wú7mesh Sníichim, one of the two Indigenous languages of the area (the other being hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓), as the events occurred on the unceded land of the Skw̓wú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), and sə̓lilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

360 Riot Walk is a documentary, a mapping project, and an artwork. As a documentary, it tells the story not only of the 1907 riots, but also of the rise of anti-Asian sentiment that preceded it and the aftermath of subsequent restrictions against Asian immigration that were enacted.

Asiatic Exclusion League

A public meeting will be held in
the Auditorium of Labor Hall
MONDAY, AUGUST 12,
at 8 p. m., for the formation of
an Asiatic Exclusion League
in this city

All the local members of the Legislature and
the Dominion member for this city have been
invited to attend and address the meeting

As a mapping project, it traces the founding of the Asiatic Exclusion League's Vancouver chapter and how its racist histrionics incited an angry white mob to riot in Chinatown and Powell Street for over two days. As an artwork, it is an immersive video that employs cutting edge technology, albeit with a lo-fi approach, akin to a site-specific interactive slide show accompanied by a voice-over, with the imagery responding to your body's movements.

This book is a continuation of the journey that the walking tour has taken, circling back to the original English script, co-written by Michael Barnholden and me. I have included a reflective essay chronicling the process and challenges of the making of the artwork, as well as other projects that preceded and informed it. There are visual excerpts of the panoramic photographs from each of the thirteen tour stops, archival images and documents embedded into the 360 photos, and photodocumentation of guided tours.

Perhaps most significant are the essays by contributing writers, which provide a more detailed contextualization of some issues of the time and their impact on our lives today. I am honoured that historian Patricia E. Roy has provided the foreword to this book. Her book *A White Man's Province* (1989), with its insightful and incisive investigation into the propagation of racist attitudes and exclusionary practices and policies, has been an influential text for me ever since I began researching what it means to be Chinese in this place that I call home. In their essay, "Uprooting the Racism in Our Ranks: Reflections from a Labour Perspective," Asian Canadian Labour Alliance members Stephanie Fung, Anna Liu, karine ng 吴珏颖, and Chris Ramsaroop provide a contemporary perspective on anti-Asian violence in Canada, which has increased significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic, and calls out for organized labour to confront and stop this spreading of hate. Angela May and Nicole



▲
*East Indian immigrants at the CPR pier
 loading possessions onto horse-drawn
 wagons, ca. 1910. | Photo: George
 Barrowclough. Vancouver Public
 Library, 9426*

Yakashiro’s “Why We Say Powell Street and Not ‘Japantown’” considers the politics of place and the power of names in Vancouver’s Powell Street (Paueru Gai) neighbourhood and how a name like “Japantown” can, ironically, precipitate displacement in the very neighbourhood from which Japanese Canadians were forcibly removed during the Second World War. Paul Englesberg’s “The Bellingham Riot” focuses on the agitation and violence against South Asians in the Washington state mill town that took place three days prior to Vancouver’s own riot and how widespread such attacks were along the West Coast in 1907. Melody Ma’s 馬勻雅 “A Changing Chinatown: On Gentrification And Resilience,” explores the history of Vancouver’s historical Chinatown, its roots in anti-Chinese exclusion, and the present-day threat of gentrification that is eroding the neighbourhood’s cultural identity. Andy Yan’s “Census Making and City Building: Data Perspectives on the 1907 Anti-Asian Riots and the Development of Vancouver” looks at how the Census was used not as a neutral tool of quantitative measurement, but as a socially constructed measure that reflected the ideas and values of the toolmakers. He posits that the Census was and still is a contested space used to determine who is and who is not considered a Canadian and who belongs to the city. And Jeffrey R. Masuda, Aaron Franks, Audrey Kobayashi, Trevor Wideman, and the Right to Remain Research Collective’s “An Urban Rights Praxis of Remaining in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside” examines 150 years of colonial policies of racial containment in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside through their research project, which involves past and present members of this community voicing their experiences in the pursuit of resistance to those very policies. I am indebted to the contributing writers for their patience and openness throughout the editorial process. The wealth and depth

of their knowledge and lived experience is evident in the writings they have created for this publication.

360 Riot Walk was launched on July 27, 2019, at the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, which was the project's lead collaborator and host. The first guided tours took place the following week at the Powell Street Festival. Community partners included the Japanese Language School and Japanese Hall, the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC, the Carnegie Community Centre, and Project 1907. Funding for production and development of the tour was provided by Creative BC and the BC Arts Council, the City of Vancouver's Neighbourhood Matching Fund, and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Explore Grant through Emily Carr University of Art + Design, where I teach. Development of this book was made possible through the financial assistance from the BC Arts Council.

In 2020, the 360 tour was significantly revised with upgraded visual elements and a new website, with updated instructional videos, commissioned writings, and additional resources. In 2021, the Powell Street Festival took on stewardship of the guided tours, for which I am grateful, as they are the ideal partner, given that their ongoing commitment to the Downtown Eastside community has been consistently progressive and, perhaps most importantly, courageously and radically inclusive.



▲
*Stop 2: Carrall Street and East
Hastings Street. | 360 Riot Walk*

Where You Are Standing: The Embodied History of *360 Riot Walk*

HENRY TSANG

“Where you are standing ..” is the first thing you hear in the voice-over at the beginning of *360 Riot Walk*, because it was there, on the very ground under your feet, where the 1907 anti-Asian riots took place. Standing there, you can see, hear, feel, smell, and taste the reality of the present while projecting yourself into the past, bearing witness to the events that created a lasting impact still evident today.

How things have changed since then. And yet, some other things haven't. In *360 Riot Walk*, buildings around you are plastered with posters promoting white nationalist ideologies which may be from a century past, but some of these ideals are still alive today and, for some, just as urgent. When you are standing on what was once the site of racist violence, does your relationship to this place change? Do you feel implicated, ashamed, indignant, complicit? If you had been on the streets of Vancouver on September 7, 1907, would you have joined the parade organized by the Asiatic Exclusion League and the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council? Would you have gathered at City Hall to cheer on the speeches by politicians, labour organizers, and Christian leaders outraged by the presence of Asian people in their city? Would you have been swept up by the energy of the crowd and marched toward Chinatown to attack Chinese people and their homes and businesses, then on to Powell Street, where the Japanese lived? Would you have been