



**ELIMIN8HATE STYLE GUIDE:**

# **REPORTING ON ASIAN CANADIAN COMMUNITIES**

**BEST PRACTICES FOR REPORTING STORIES ON ASIAN CANADIAN  
COMMUNITIES FOR JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA WORKERS**

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“Narratives in film and television are often inspired by news stories — if journalists are writing stereotypical stories about racialized communities or not representing them at all, how will these stories from underrepresented communities make it to film and television and how are we portrayed when they do make it to the screen?”

— Barbara Lee, Founder of the Vancouver Asian Film Festival

## **Introduction**

This style guide is a community response to decades of unrepresentative media coverage of the Asian-Canadian community — with contributions from racialized journalists across the country — that outlines best practices when reporting on Asian Canadians and peoples of Asian heritage. Journalists, broadcasters, and media workers have the responsibility to understand and examine what they are covering, what is not being covered, how they are covering these stories, and why. This living document sets out best practices that journalists can follow to ensure coverage of racialized communities is respectful and representative.

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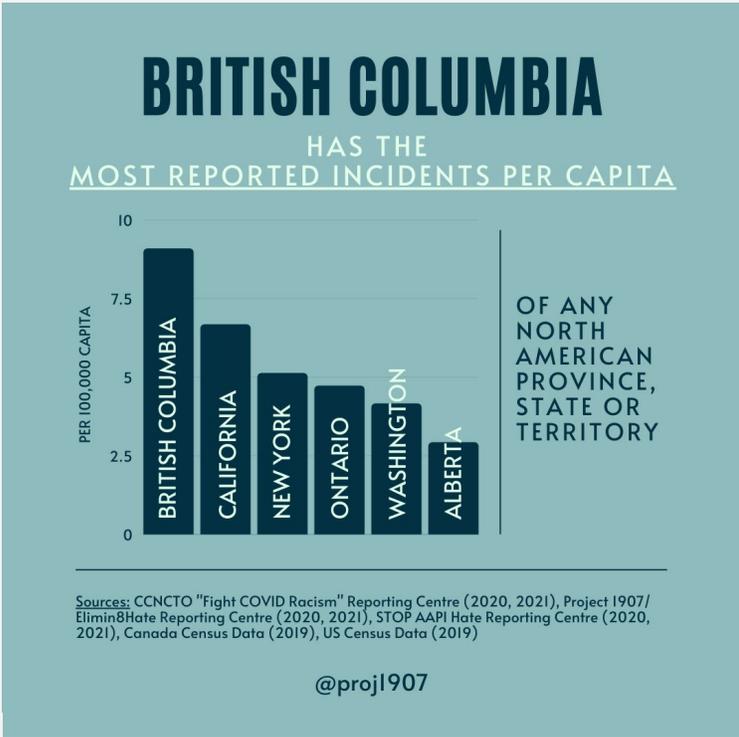
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# BACKGROUND

In 2020 there was a 717% rise in reported anti-Asian racist attacks in the Metro Vancouver region from the previous year, according to the Vancouver Police Departments' [log of reported anti-Asian hate crimes](#) spiking from 12 cases in 2019 to 142 in 2020.

The surge of hate crimes reported to the police is alarming, but is not completely representative. Some community members do not feel comfortable reporting to authorities, and some reported incidents do not meet the threshold of being a prosecutable crime.

In response to the surge of these hate crimes, [Elimin8Hate](#) in collaboration with [project 1907](#) began collecting community reports of anti-Asian racism in March 2020. Then data was aggregated from across Canada including reports from the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter and Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice (CCNC TO and CCNC-SJ, respectively).



The data revealed that **British Columbia has the highest number of reported incidents of anti-Asian racism per capita in North America – higher than the states of California and New York.**

## Biased Reporting Is Not A Thing of the Past

Journalists must ensure that certain stories or perspectives are not being sensationalized or exaggerated to fit a perceived stereotype or narrative that could ultimately reinforce racist attitudes. It is important to avoid narratives that encourage racial fetishization or race fetish porn – the perverse fascination with other people’s misfortune.

### What is Racial Fetishization?

Race fetish porn is profoundly dehumanizing and makes those witnessing racial violence feel powerless and desensitized to the very things we need their help to address. [In a March 2021 interview in Vox](#), author and film scholar Celine Parreñas Shimizu explained how the **hypersexual and docile tropes of Asian women** – in popular culture and race fetish porn – can have pernicious, and even deadly, consequences, citing the Atlanta shooting that killed 8 people – six of whom were Asian. This is inextricably linked to harassment and sexualized violence against Asian women. Women of Asian descent, who have reported 2.3 times more incidents of violence ([aaja.org](#)). [Elimin8hate.org](#) reports over 60% of anti-Asian racist incidents were reported by women.

Biased reporting that scapegoats the Asian Canadian community is not new and media outlets have played a significant role in supporting the rise of anti-Asian racism.

The way the following stories have been reported or framed in recent years carried racist undertones that perpetuate harmful stereotypes of Asian-Canadians. More vigilance is vital from journalists, editors, and media workers when reporting on these issues. Those assigned to work on these issues should have a thorough understanding of implicit bias and how to consciously interrupt the cycle of perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Apologizing or removing stories after the harm is done is not good enough. Improved standards and increased vigilance to cultural nuances is needed before a story is published.

## Examples of Biased Reporting

### Vancouver Real Estate Prices

- ◆ There were news stories that built up a fervour narrative about “foreign Chinese buyers” along with stories about such characters. Buyers themselves were not interviewed in pieces the majority of the time, instead focusing on white locals upset about Chinese neighbours moving into their neighbourhoods.

***“In 2015 Chinese buyers accounted for a third of all Vancouver-area purchases, and prices jumped 40 percent.”***

- ◆ British Columbia’s own politician correlated rising Vancouver home prices to “toxic demand” emanating from out of Asia, notably China.

NEWS FEATURES »

### Revisiting real estate, race, and how the foreign-buyers narrative came to dominate Vancouver media

The divide between evidence and belief raises the question: how did the region become so convinced that foreign money is the dominating force driving the Vancouver real-estate market?

### Affordable Housing Issue

- ◆ News coverage<sup>1</sup> on affordable housing often focuses on a perceived higher percentage of non-resident foreign real estate investors than what the data shows, all while ignoring White developers that went overseas to Asia to attract speculative buyers to Canada supported by Government trade missions. This article<sup>2</sup> in the Georgia Straight uncovered the role biased reporting had in creating this narrative, and the impact these falsehoods have had on the Asian-Canadian community.

### Empty Homes Tax and Speculation Tax

- ◆ Stories on the need to implement these taxes have racist undertones, implying Asian Canadian homebuyers are not Canadians.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-christy-clark-trade-mission-asia-real-estate-1.3604817>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.straight.com/news/735161/revisiting-real-estate-race-and-how-foreign-buyers-narrative-came-dominate-vancouver>

## BLAME GAME

### **In the struggle to get its red-hot housing market under control, Vancouver targets Chinese buyers**

- ◆ 5 years after the taxes were implemented that scapegoated Asian communities, housing prices are higher than before, disproving the claim and blame placed on Asian Canadian communities for the high real estate prices.

#### **Casinos and Money Laundering**

- ◆ Stories focusing only on the money laundering that has been happening in recent years while not mentioning the money laundering that has happened for many years with criminal organizations that are not racialized.
- ◆ Stories that disregard the government's complicit and lax policies, and the white-led organizations and companies that contributed to making Canada an attractive place to launder money.

## INVESTIGATIONS

### **How Chinese gangs are laundering drug money through Vancouver real estate**

- ◆ Compared to the media coverage on wealthy Canadians dodging taxes for years via offshore accounts, stories focusing on money laundering with implicit racist undertones were covered more frequently.
- ◆ Stories that perpetuate the notion that all money that Asians brought to Canada were the result of illegitimate business practices or ill-gotten gains from unsavory activities.

#### **Ethnic Neighbourhoods as COVID-19 Hotspots**

- ◆ Covert blaming of home gatherings in Fraser Health Region as the reason for spreading Covid – focusing on Diwali gatherings in South Asian community breakouts rather than putting in context that many of the front line workers and essential workers are from South Asian communities (and why they are working these oftentimes low-paid positions, i.e. being from lower socio-economic brackets, etc.). Harm can be done through broad generalizations.

- ◆ Connecting Chinese people and Chinatowns to the spread of COVID-19 (see [Covid-19 Coverage](#) for more details).

## CANADA

# The enrollment controversy\*

Worries that efforts in the U.S. to limit enrollment of Asian students in top universities may migrate to Canada

*Initially titled "Too Asian: Some frosh don't want to study at an Asian university"*

## University Enrollment

- ◆ Asians taking up jobs and spaces in universities - that there is something wrong with the admissions process and that Asian Canadian students do not deserve their admissions.

# COVID-19 COVERAGE

- ◆ The Vancouver Asian Film Festival (VAFF), EliminateHate and Asian Canadian communities are urging journalists to follow the recommendations [listed by the Asian American Journalists Association \(AAJA\)](#), which states: “to exercise care in their coverage of the coronavirus outbreak in Canada and around the world to ensure accurate and fair portrayals of Asians and Asian Canadians to avoid fueling xenophobia and racism that have already emerged since the outbreak.
- ◆ Use of images of people wearing face masks without proper context. Do not only show Asian Canadians in face masks.
- ◆ Do not use generic images of Chinatown when reporting on anti-Asian racist attacks, when that is not only where these incidents are happening. Only include images of a local Chinatown if it is directly related to a news story, rather than as a way to illustrate the virus or racism. By asking victims or advocates to be interviewed in Chinatown perpetuates the “otherness” or perpetual foreigner stereotype.”

# CONTEXT MATTERS

- ◆ **The Asian community is not homogenous. We are not a monolith.** Media workers and journalists must understand that negative reinforcement from individuals within our own community can perpetuate harm and re-victimize the Asian community. Due to social and cultural conditioning, internalized racism is prevalent in racialized communities – without addressing this, media coverage can reinforce negative stereotypes.
- ◆ Newsrooms should consider the relevance of their reporting, the context in which they are reporting that story, and if they are projecting any culpability onto the victims.
- ◆ What sources or resources are you using to inform your reporting, and are they verifiable or credible? **The safety of the subjects interviewed should be a high priority** – anonymity should be offered and granted if sensitive information (full names, background information) can harm the subject and those around them.
- ◆ **Provide context.** Newsrooms are urged to cover racist attacks in the context of the current rise in attacks on Asian Canadians and Asian Americans. This is a time of increasing attacks on the Asian Canadian community and heightened fear among these communities across Canada.
- ◆ **Be mindful** that how a story is told can often embolden people to act out their racist attitudes, usually on the most vulnerable which include children, the elderly, Trans and gender-nonconforming individuals, and women.
- ◆ In the aftermath of the Atlanta shooting, there was an overwhelming and sudden interest in EliminateHate’s work by the media. **We are saddened that it took the murder of Asian women for our voices to be heard, although we**

**had been advocating for increased media attention on the rise in anti-Asian incidents for over a year. During our media interviews, our answers focused on the role the media plays in spreading and enabling racism were left out.** Not only does the media need to report on what is happening – but they also need to reflect on how the industry has played a role in harming equity-seeking communities.

- ◆ Also of importance to EliminateHate is the representation of Asian people and especially Asian women and queer individuals in media. There is a long history of fetishizing and hyper-sexualizing Asian women, sex workers, and LGBTQ+ individuals, which are contributing factors to what happened in Atlanta. The downplaying of the role media has in harming communities must be addressed.
- ◆ Do not ensconce sex work or undocumented immigrants in shame. If your work involves reporting on sex work or undocumented immigrants, take the time to contextualize your reporting. For example, highlighting that undocumented immigrants are often escaping harsh situations from their countries of origin, and sex work is one low-barrier way they can financially provide for themselves and their families. Legal, paid work requires documentation that costs money, time and requires language and technological skills that they may not have access to.
- ◆ When investigating stories and fact-checking information, consider the racist systems that may have been the root cause. For example, if you are a reporter covering an increase in COVID-19 exposures in South Asian and Southeast Asian communities, consider how this may be due to the higher prevalence of members from these communities working in frontline occupations.

# HOW ARE YOU COVERING STORIES?

- ◆ **Safety.** Journalists must understand that people don't feel safe revealing their full names/identities or having photos of their faces splashed all over the news when talking about racism. Journalists, editors, and news organizations must consider what they are doing to protect the safety of the people involved.
- ◆ **Is your publication or organization only covering stories from Asian communities and other equity-seeking communities when we are victimized by wrongdoing?** Prioritize covering stories of our successes, talents, and skills throughout the entire year – not only around our holidays and heritage months. Write and report on us as accomplished humans with complex lives – not as just victims. If you think these stories don't generate enough clicks, likes, or interest, then perhaps this disturbing trend warrants some journalistic investigation on why stories of IBPOC success are not celebrated as much as white success.
- ◆ **Story placement** – In print, are you running stories next to another that perpetuates a damaging stereotype? On digital, are related stories being grouped together because of race. If this is being done by your AI, is there implicit bias coded? For instance, are stories of Communist China being placed next to stories of Asian Canadian communities? If so, consider how this could cultivate a covert message that Asian Canadians are still foreigners.
- ◆ **Narrative of victimization:** Journalists often come to Asian Canadian individuals, businesses, and organizations with a planned narrative or pre-conceived notions about our experiences. They often only want to tell the story from the angle of the victim and often only when the story can be heard from the so-called victim directly. There must be an openness from the journalist and editorial team to learn and report on our communities in

an accurately representative way, especially when our lived experiences do not match the journalists' preconceived notions.

- ◆ Media organizations not playing into the stereotypes of this narrative or victimization does not mean ignoring the very real barriers and discrimination that Asian Canadian communities face. **Journalists should understand and include in their reporting the systemic context on why a particular group might be facing challenges, and ways that they are demonstrating agency within their situation, which would make them more human.** For example, Alberta's top doctor said Filipino Canadians can't help but work while they're sick because of their "[strong ethic](#)." A more nuanced story might explain Canada-Philippine labour flows, or the fact that many workers have multiple jobs and support multiple households.
- ◆ **Sensationalized headlines are inflammatory.** Not everyone online reads the entire article, so headlines crafted for clickbait are a gateway for internet trolls. Misleading or sensationalized headlines should not be used to get clicks when reporting on sensitive topics involving marginalized individuals.

## **Race and real estate: how hot Chinese money is making Vancouver unlivable**

- ◆ **Do not conflate capitalism with skin colour.** Focus on holding market forces and government policy accountable rather than blaming individuals and communities.
- ◆ **Familiarize yourself with the Model Minority Myth** – the perception of universal success among Asian-Americans that masks the role racism plays in the persistent struggles of others – its harm on Asian communities, and how this myth pits the Asian communities against other communities of colour.
- ◆ Use a multiracial lens when reporting and avoid racially charged and dehumanizing language that perpetuates stereotypes. Be familiar with evolving racial and ethnic communities in the geographic areas you are covering.

- ◆ **Do not ignore or erase the contributions of BIPOC leadership, globally and within Canada.** Many Asian countries have been very successful in their COVID-19 response but this has been ignored. In July 2020, The New York Times' Hannah Beech wrote the following: "Is there a genetic component in which the immune systems of Thais and others in the Mekong River region are more resistant to the coronavirus? Or is it some alchemy of all these factors that has insulated this country of 70 million people?" Instead of amplifying the public measures Thai people took, the New York Times attributed the country's successful response to the pandemic with magic.
  
- ◆ **Don't run one-off pieces based on our trauma.** Trauma is intergenerational. Revisit your pieces. Write stories on how our communities are coping that publicize our resilience, and how others can help to prevent racialized violence.
  
- ◆ **Don't ask us how we feel.** We have such short soundbites to get our messages out that asking us how we feel reduces the ability to talk about what's really important and action items that will help us be safer.
  - A better way to ask would be: "Would you like to share with others your thoughts and feelings about \_\_\_\_\_?"

# USE SPECIFIC LANGUAGE

- ◆ **Understand anti-Asian racism and invisibility.** Racism against Asian Canadians is tremendously nuanced, complex, has remained historically invisible, and includes a long history of dismissal, denial, deflection, and critiquing.
- ◆ **Name it — call anti-Asian racism what it is and when the victims state that is what they experienced. Believe the victim.** Be specific and descriptive when referring to violence and harassment aimed at Asians and Asian Canadians. Avoid using euphemisms like “anti-Asian sentiment,” and use more accurate terms like “anti-Asian hate”, “anti-Asian incident”, “anti-Asian violence”, or “assault against Asian Canadians.”
- ◆ **Ethno-agnostic Language:** When reporting on foreign-influenced corruption and money laundering in BC, be diligent and intentional with language. Use ethno-agnostic language, be specific about the states or actors involved, do not conflate these issues with an entire race, it is harmful and dangerous, and empowers racists to substantiate their hate.
- ◆ Be mindful of the evolving dialogues regarding how communities and/or individuals want to be identified.

# DIVERSIFY YOUR SOURCES

- ◆ Asian Canadian communities are not a monolith. There are many intersectionalities and intergenerational differences. Therefore, it is important to diversify your sources by interviewing and quoting Asian Canadian community leaders from a broad range of community groups if the story is about more than one specific Asian Canadian community.
- ◆ Avoid assumptions and insinuations by speaking to the appropriate community members or initiatives when reporting on sensitive topics. Just as a publication would with a whistleblower, offer to grant anonymity to subjects when reporting on sensitive topics.
- ◆ Race, ethnicity, religion, and national origin can be relevant. However, just because authorities or sources mention them does not mean this information is relevant. Journalists must have a thoughtful discussion about the relevance before including these details in their stories. Using racial descriptors when they are not relevant or without explaining their relevance perpetuates harmful stereotypes.
- ◆ Provide proper credit to the owner/creator of the media, images, and content you are sharing or referencing. Request permission prior to its use.
- ◆ Local ethnic publications and their reporters are credible sources. If you are an editor, consider a co-byline with your staff writer or commissioning local community stories to community reporters and pay them accordingly for their contributions to stories.

# RESPECT ASIAN NAMES

- ◆ **Learn to pronounce victims' names properly.** Consult the victims or people who know the victims about their preferred pronunciation names, just as you would with pronouns.
- ◆ Request for subjects to provide how they want their name to be presented. Do not assume that you can abbreviate one's names as middle names. First names made up of two characters or two words are common in many Asian languages.
- ◆ Ask for consent to publish a source or subject's full name, especially when the nature of the story is focused on a hate crime or racist attack they were a victim of.
- ◆ Following the Atlanta spa shootings in 2020, AAJA and Asian American reporters Janice Yu and Frances Wang [created an online name guide](#) so journalists and media workers would use the correct pronunciation when saying the victims' names aloud. Proper pronunciation of one's name is vital to the cogency of a story, and initiatives like this one should be a standard.

# REPORTING ON #HASHTAGS

- ◆ **Use hashtags to support a cause, not for self-serving reasons.**
- ◆ Before reporting on hashtags, stop and think about what hashtags are trending – and why. Aside from their marketing power, ask what the syntax of the hashtag is and the multiple ways communities can interpret them. For example, #stopasianhate, #StopAntiAsianHate, and #stopAAPIhate are all popular hashtags trending and there are arguments for and against each of them.
- ◆ Some may ask – why use #StopAsianHate when it’s the result of the root cause? – in this case, why not use #stopwhitesupremacy instead? Well, not all of the perpetrators are white, and using #stopwhitesupremacy diverts the focus away from supporting the Asian community.
- ◆ Recently, [Pacific Islander communities in the United States have asked why they are being clumped together with the Asian community.](#) As these hashtags become more widespread, the discourse surrounding hashtags can spin a very complex web very quickly, so it’s important to amplify these nuanced discussions and make conscious and appropriate decisions when reporting on them.
- ◆ Be mindful of the evolving dialogues regarding hashtags.

# MONITOR HATE

- ◆ **Monitor the comments section.** Media companies and their employees – journalists, editors, publishers – have a moral obligation to educate and inform the public, not provide platforms for racist trolling. There must be better practices in moderating the comment section on articles addressing anti-racism (in general) than the current “on”/“off” switching of the comment section. We respect the right to freedom of speech, but there must be actionable consideration made to the triggering nature of many of these comments – if not, your silence is empowering to the perpetrators and they will continue to harm the journalist and the subjects involved. We need those with influence, a platform, and reach to use their platforms to speak up and speak out this hatred – only then will marginalized communities feel a little safer.
- ◆ In March 2021, the Vancouver Sun [disabled all comments under a story](#) about Vancouver advocates demanding protection for Asian and migrant women and sex workers after it received an abundance of vitriolic comments. Similar consideration can be given to stories that cover equity-seeking groups to protect them. This is not a matter of freedom of speech – it is a matter of promoting hate. You can voice your views, just not on the media news outlets.
- ◆ Threats and hate speech on social media must be taken seriously. It is common for journalists and the subjects they report on to be subject to disturbing threats that can be mentally and emotionally taxing. News organizations cannot be complicit. Minimizing the influence of threats and hate speech on social media should be a priority – news organizations and journalists should use their power to work with social media companies to make their platforms a safer place.
- ◆ Something that is institutionalized is not always right. As a media worker in Canada, you have the power to change systems and traditional protocols that exist in legacy media. Systemic racist structures, policies and procedures should be challenged by those in power and not just racialized media workers.

# BE MINDFUL OF ASIAN CANADIAN JOURNALISTS

- ◆ **Encourage and support people of color in your newsroom to report on their lived experiences and amplify the voices of their communities.** Provide the support those employees need and be mindful that reporting on issues involving one's own community can be physically and mentally taxing.
- ◆ Empower and support your Asian Canadian journalists and colleagues. If they are experiencing anxiety, grief, and trauma — [Elimin8hate.org](https://www.elimin8hate.org) has a list of mental health resources for the Asian Canadian community.
- ◆ **Be mindful that not at all journalists might want to/have the knowledge to report on a community they belong to or appear to belong to** — editors and producers should be conscious of this when assigning stories, especially to freelancers and contract workers.
- ◆ **Provide mentorship opportunities to members from equity-seeking groups who have lived experiences.** A diverse team of journalists and reporters makes for richer and perhaps more thoughtful content. When commissioning a story, consider the following:
  - Who are the people covering stories on equity-seeking communities?
  - Do they have lived experience that can lead to more thoughtful reporting?
  - Are they informed on critical race issues? Are they being tokenized?
- ◆ Racialized journalists are underrepresented in newsrooms across the country, especially in leadership positions. Newsrooms must provide racialized journalists with the necessary mental wellness support as our communities face increased violence and sentiment.

- ◆ Many Asian Canadian journalists that provide intrepid reporting on their own communities experience compounding trauma while covering violent and racist situations. Recognize their dedication and commend their resilience.
- ◆ **Do not tokenize racialized and LGBTQ+ journalists for their perspectives.** It is degrading when journalists are only assigned to cover issues within their own community – it can also take a toll on their mental health and physical well-being.

# CALLS TO ACTION

- ◆ Support The Canadian Journalists of Colour Calls to Action
  - <https://www.cjoc.net/white-paper>
- ◆ Newsrooms need more journalists of colour
- ◆ Create a Media watchdog organization
- ◆ Fund an annual report that tracks news stories from racialized communities
- ◆ Support racialized media outlets that have a diversity of journalists of colour
- ◆ Support greater representation in front and behind all media including screen industries, by using your consumer dollars
- ◆ Write to government to fund grassroots organization working to dismantle inequitable systems

VAFF and EliminateHate would like to thank Asian American Journalist Association and raceforward's Race Reporting Guide for their invaluable resources that contributed to the development of these best practices for Canadian journalists reporting on Asian Canadian communities.

# ABOUT VAFF AND ELIMIN8HATE

The [Vancouver Asian Film Festival \(VAFF\)](#) is the longest running Asian film festival in Canada and has been an incubator of talent for Asian Canadian creators and filmmakers for 25 years while showcasing the best of Asian Canadian cinema. As a community leader, VAFF has a long history of offering capacity building, mentorship and professional development programs to its Asian Canadian community and other communities of colour.

VAFF's core belief is that Representation is one of the most effective tools to combat systemic racism. Stories shown on the screen can influence how people think, feel, interpret and perceive the world around them. To fully participate in society, Canadians of Asian heritage need to be seen and heard authentically and this can only be achieved through representation in front and behind the camera.

[Elimin8Hate \(E8\)](#) is the advocacy arm of the Vancouver Asian Film Festival and strives to interrupt, dismantle and eliminate anti-Asian racism at the individual, institutional and systemic level by providing anti-Asian racism learning opportunities, creating multimedia projects and offering safe and inclusive ways to participate in initiatives aimed at disrupting oppressive systems and attitudes.

## **Contributors**

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