

How we got here

Racial history of the City of Boulder

The Boulder community has long benefited from its beautiful natural surroundings; and, like many communities across the United States, the city was created by forcibly occupying indigenous lands. Originally the home of the Southern Arapaho, Cheyenne and several other Native American tribes, miners during the beginning of the Gold Rush and a steady influx of white settlers forced the tribes off their ancestral lands and onto reservations.

In 1858, the first non-native community in Boulder County was established in the area now known as Settler's Park, in violation of the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie. Many of the indigenous inhabitants were killed or forced to relocate as a result of these white settlers. In later decades, the city continued deliberate discrimination against immigrant people of color, including Chinese railroad workers, African Americans and Mexicans. In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) developed a strong presence in the state, and many members held various positions in elected office and in government administration.

The KKK eventually became a powerful organization in Boulder County and at the state level, and many of the attacks in Boulder County were targeted at Latinx individuals. Their exclusion from the community was exemplified in signs saying "No Mexicans Allowed" posted in front of shops and restaurants across Colorado. In late November and December 1922, the Klan organized four parades through the town of Boulder. One included nearly 300 Klansmen, 63 cars, and a float covered in white.¹

Due to a labor shortage, the immigrant work force was somewhat welcomed for a short time throughout the early to mid-twentieth century. However, after demands subsided and laborers were less needed, people were sent away. On May 18, 1932, the Boulder County Commissioners passed a resolution funding the deportation of Mexican families to the United States-Mexico border based on "there being no prospect of them finding employment."²

In 1928, the city adopted its first zoning code, which prioritized single-family housing in much of the city and pushed "obnoxious industries" (read unskilled labor) to the outskirts. This, on top of Boulder's already high real estate prices, effectively excluded people who had not had or had been denied access to the education required for the allowed industries. (Carnegie Library for Local History, Boulder's First Zoning Ordinance report, by Dan Corson, 1997, 998-5-15) In the ensuing years, skilled and unskilled laborers (often those denied access to higher education) had to find jobs outside of Boulder.

As the city continued to grow, Boulder became a hub for scientific research and technology industries. The dominance of these advanced and highly technical industries in the city ultimately excluded people of color from many job opportunities because, historically, they were denied an education and most desired industries require an education.³

In 1974, the City of Boulder elected its first and only black mayor, Penfield Tate II. He was mayor until 1976. Tate advocated for equality for all and took action to protect the LGBTQ community and make them feel more welcome.⁴

Continued on next page

¹ Bowley, Nicoli R., "Ten Dollars to Hate Somebody": Hispanic Communities and the Ku Klux Klan in Colorado, 1917-1925 (2017), retrieved from https://scholar.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2497&context=honr_theses

² Boulder County Commissioners' Resolution, agreeing to pay train fare for unemployed Mexican families to the border, May 18, 1932, retrieved from <https://teachbo-colatinohistory.colorado.edu/primarysource/boulder-countycommissioners-resolution-1932/>

³ Delgado, Richard and Stefancic, Jean, Home-Grown Racism: Colorado's Historic Embrace - And Denial - Of Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (1999), retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2411625

⁴ Taylor, Carol, Boulder's LGBTQ history has many lessons to teach, including that backlash often follows progress (2016), retrieved from <http://getboulder.com/boulders-lgbt-history/>

Racial history of the City of Boulder continued

He attempted to introduce a sexual preference amendment to Boulder's Human Rights Ordinance, but it lost adoption by the general public. Residents then sought to recall Tate and all council members who supported the amendment. While the recall of Tate failed, he did not win in the next election.⁵ Tate is quoted as saying, "The measure of a great city and a great country is not the size of its greenbelt, but how it treats its people."

Some ways the city government has strengthened and increased racial inequity include:

- **Height Restrictions** – This practice of restricting the height of new construction to a certain height (ca. 55 feet) to maintain scenic views of the foothills and Flatirons permanently limits the amount of available housing in the city, thus directly harming low-income families.
- **The Green Belt** – Buying up the open space around Boulder in an effort to preserve nature creates restricted movement in and out of Boulder and drives up cost of housing due to limited residential parcels.
- **Zoning** – Designating mobile homes to the exterior of the city limits and not providing water results in segregation by income.
- **Gentrification** – Destruction of some older homes to get rid of unsightly, unkempt buildings to preserve natural landscape, without replacement of housing displaces marginalized communities.

A 2015 article in Boulder Weekly "Black in Boulder: Boulder racism through the eyes of people of color" sums up the reality for people of color living in Boulder:

"I think, generally speaking, people in Boulder pride themselves on being very liberal, very progressive. On top of that, they're very well off overall. I think that idea of liberalism sometimes blinds to the notion of where people in this community contribute to the perpetuation of white privilege or white supremacy — even if they aren't of mind or heart a person who thinks that these other people are less than."

From 2012 to 2017, civil rights complaints increased in Boulder that pertained to unequal treatment in employment, housing charges, and public accommodations. The Human Rights Commission speak-out event in 2017 revealed stories of Muslim women afraid to wear headscarves because they were being insulted in the streets, parents driving their children to Longmont for school because they were being treated differently by teachers and school administration in Boulder, and people being followed by employees in stores because of the color of their skin.

Across the United States a person's race remains a key predictor of access, opportunity, safety and well being. Boulder is no exception to this. For example, according to the American Community Survey, in 2017 the overall poverty rate in Boulder County was 12.6% for white individuals, but the rate jumps to an average of 23.4% for all other races and 23.5% for Latinx county residents. Over the years, the City of Boulder has attempted to examine, as individuals and groups, what diversity, equity and inclusion mean to our organization and community. Despite these efforts and intentions, this work has failed to achieve racial equity.

The city intends to understand its relationship with race and will endeavor to collect data that supports a deeper understanding of actions and impacts, as well as data to help identify and track outcomes of racial equity work. In December 2019, the City Council of the City of Boulder passed a resolution "... committing the city of Boulder to promote racial equity in city relationships, programs, services and policies."

⁵ University of Colorado Boulder, Penfield Wallace Tate II (1968), retrieved from <https://www.colorado.edu/law/pen-wallace-tate-ii-68>

Resources

Racial history of the City of Boulder

- Hickcox, Abby (2007) "Green Belt, White City: Race and the Natural Landscape in Boulder, Colorado," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*: Vol. 29 : Iss. 2 , Article 3. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/discourse/vol29/iss2/3>
 - Summary: hidden behind the guise of open space preservation and conservation lurks a philosophy of ensuring the "right people" enjoy Boulder's landscape in perpetuity.
- Southern Arapahoe Chief Niwot, History and Background
- Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples, Toolkit
- Conflict, Race, Violence Video (Boulder County Latino History)
- Latinos of Boulder County, Colorado; 1900-1980; Volume I: History and Contributions; Chapter: Conflict, Racism, and Violence, 1910-1940
- Ellen Tate Interview (2001) from the Carnegie Library, Boulder, CO
 - ABSTRACT: Ellen Tate describes growing up in Philadelphia, moving frequently with her husband, Penfield Tate II, while he was in the military; and moving to Boulder in 1967. She speaks about experiences as an African American, experiencing racism while traveling in the 1960s, creating a sense of black community in Boulder, and race relations in general in Boulder.
- De Laris Carpenter Interview (2001) from the Carnegie Library, Boulder, CO
 - ABSTRACT: De Laris Carpenter talks about her upbringing in Mississippi; her life in Boulder; her career as a teacher, counselor, and administrator; and the role of family in her life, addressing both her own childhood and her role as a parent. Throughout the interview, she discusses the African American community and interactions of the white and African American communities, including discussion of racism in Boulder, at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and in the Boulder Valley Schools.
- "Boulder Releases Data on Law Enforcement Discrimination", KUNC Report, May 1, 2019
- "Boulder prides itself on being welcoming to all. But its citizens of color tell a different story", Daily Camera Article, July 28, 2018