

# The Journey Here

## Racial History of the City of Boulder

Before endeavoring to advance racial equity, it is important to understand some of the City of Boulder's racial past.

For thousands of years generations of Indigenous Peoples

lived in and traversed the Boulder Valley – enriching countless oral and tribal traditions that shaped a special connection to the land.<sup>1</sup> However, miners during the beginning of the Gold Rush and a steady influx of white occupiers violated treaties and forcibly removed tribes from the Boulder area, severing their connection with the land. For thousands of Indigenous Peoples who live in reservations outside of Colorado – and for those who live in Boulder today – traditions, stories and languages passed down over the generations still connect them with Boulder lands.

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 occupiers. In addition, white residents of Boulder played a key role in the Sand Creek Massacre, which set off a long series of conflicts leading to the Battle of Little Bighorn and concluding with the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre.<sup>2</sup>

In later decades, the local and state governments continued deliberate discrimination against Indigenous Peoples and immigrant people of color, including Asian 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 rise of the Klan in Boulder and Colorado paralleled the nationwide ascendancy of the Second Ku Klux Klan. This began in the mid-1910s, as the belief that the cause of the former Confederacy was justified — known as the "Lost Cause" mythos — gained traction.<sup>3</sup>

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 Latino individuals. Their exclusion from the community was exemplified in signs saying "No Mexicans Allowed" posted in front of shops and restaurants across Colorado. In 1922, the Klan organized four parades through the town of Boulder. One included nearly 300 Klansmen, 63 cars and a float covered in white.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> City of Boulder Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples Collaborations. Retrieved from: [https://cityofboulder.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/CMO/RECT/\\_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B933f44b9-df29-4266-9420-008fa47c2266%7D&action=edit&wdPid=7f4cbeaa](https://cityofboulder.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/CMO/RECT/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B933f44b9-df29-4266-9420-008fa47c2266%7D&action=edit&wdPid=7f4cbeaa)

<sup>2</sup> Two key Boulder leaders of the Sand Creek Massacre were David Nichols and John Chivington. In 1863, Nichols was elected Boulder Sheriff, but left that post the following year to join the Third Colorado Volunteer Cavalry as a captain. Governor John Evans tasked this unit with the suppression of indigenous peoples. As a military officer, Nichols participated in the Sand Creek Massacre on November 29, 1864. After, Nichols left the sheriff's office having been elected to the Territorial Legislature. In this capacity, he played a key role in the formation of the University of Colorado at Boulder. Retrieved from: <https://www.cpr.org/show-segment/when-to-stop-honoring-a-questionable-historical-figure-cus-had-that-debate/>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_H.\\_Nichols](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_H._Nichols)

Colonel John Chivington commanded the US Army forces at Sand Creek, and organized a Masonic Lodge in Gold Hill. Retrieved from: <https://www.nps.gov/sand/learn/historyculture/john-chivington-biography.htm>, <https://www.dailycamera.com/2014/11/15/boulder-county-shares-in-sand-creek-massacre-infamy/>, <http://www.coloradofreemasons.org/pdfDocuments/chivington.pdf>

Historical legacy of Sand Creek and continued conflict with indigenous peoples. Retrieved from: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/horrific-sand-creek-massacre-will-be-forgotten-no-more-180953403/>, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/sandcreek.htm>

<sup>3</sup> "When Bigotry Paraded Through the Streets" (2016). Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/second-klan/509468/>

<sup>4</sup> 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](https://scholar.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2497&context=honr_theses)



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.<sup>11</sup> 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."

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 that pertained to unequal treatment in employment, housing charges and public accommodations increased in Boulder. The Community Perception Assessment of Boulder<sup>12</sup> and the Human Relations Commission Speak-out event in 2018 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. According to the American Community Survey, in 2017 the overall poverty rate in Boulder County was 12.6% for white individuals but jumped to an average of 23.4% for all other races and 23.5% for Latino 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 good intentions, this work has had limited success in improving racial equity.

As described above, policies and decisions were driven by a variety of motivations. Actions ranged from unquestionably racist to well-meaning and popularly supported but lacking consideration of long-term, unintended consequences. These events and actions were not unique to Boulder and occurred throughout the United

---

<sup>11</sup> University of Colorado Boulder, Penfield Wallace Tate II (1968), retrieved from <https://www.colorado.edu/law/pen-wallace-tate-ii-68>

<sup>12</sup> Community Perception Assessment of Boulder as a Safe and Inclusive Community. Retrieved from: <https://www-static.bouldercolorado.gov/docs/CPA-1-202003061252.pdf>

States. However, a more recent rising awareness of racial equity provides us with a contemporary opportunity to scrutinize past decisions through a new lens. We are in a position to consider both socio-economic and racial factors while correcting harms that originated in the past.

**To be clear, this plan does not advocate for reversing past policy decisions. Rather, the challenge now is to ensure our policies reflect all community values, including environmental protection, quality of life and racial and soci-economic equity.** To do this, we must train a critical eye on past policies and consider their impacts in future decision-making as we actively promote measures to help resolve inequity.

The city intends to understand its relationship with race and is endeavoring to create systems in order to collect data that supports a deeper understanding of its 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 Resolution 1275<sup>13</sup> "...committing the City of Boulder to promote racial equity in city relationships, programs, services and policies."

The City of Boulder has historically leveraged its local resources to push policy efforts upwards to effect systemic change. Like climate policy and policies that address root causes of homelessness, both rooted in consequences of past policy decisions, the city's efforts to address Racial Equity should be part of a broader regional, state and national effort. We cannot and should not do this alone. **We must work together to accomplish scalable change to rectify a system that, for too long, has continued to cause so much harm.**

---

<sup>13</sup> Council Resolution #1275. Retrieved from: [https://www-static.bouldercolorado.gov/docs/signed\\_copy\\_of\\_Res\\_1275-1-202004221428.pdf?\\_ga=2.95372383.2144821488.1611337950-18428063.1598546093](https://www-static.bouldercolorado.gov/docs/signed_copy_of_Res_1275-1-202004221428.pdf?_ga=2.95372383.2144821488.1611337950-18428063.1598546093)

*Find more resources about the racial history of Boulder at the end of this Racial Equity Plan.*