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. 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.²

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.3

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.4

² 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. Retreived 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._

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-sandcreek-massacre-will-be-forgotten-no-more-180953403/, https://www.nps.gov/articles/sandcreek.htm

^{3 &}quot;When Bigotry Paraded Through the Streets" (2016). Retrieved from: https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/second-klan/509468/

⁴ Bowley, Nicoli R., "Ten Dollars to Hate Somebody": Hispanic Communities and the Ku Klux Klan in Colorado, 1917-1925 (2017) Retrieved from: https://

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 demand 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."⁵

During the first half of the 20th century, explicit racism gave way to more implicit forms of racism, legally continuing racial and socio-economic segregation. Early zoning maps and regulations were used throughout the U.S. to prevent racial and ethnic minorities from moving into middle- and upper-class neighborhoods.⁶ Federal policies such as redlining and discriminatory lending practices were common practice that effectively denied the American dream of homeownership to many people of color.⁷

Local policies are and have been more nuanced, but often still lead to similar disparate impacts as those of explicitly discriminatory policies. A citywide height limit on new construction (ca. 55 feet) to maintain scenic views of the foothills and Flatirons prevented the city from growing upwards. The height limit, the green belt that limited outward expansion of housing, and the fact that a significant portion of the city is zoned exclusively for single-family residential development, all indirectly contribute to the high cost of housing in Boulder.⁸

The high cost of housing in Boulder creates a growing economic divide within the community. Boulder also places a high value on community engagement in the development process, which increases the time and cost to build homes. The imposition of affordable housing impact fees and inclusionary housing requirements that provide permanently affordable housing have the indirect impact of increasing the cost of all residential development. Anecdotally, Boulder's high design expectations, energy efficiency and climate goals, limited vacant land for development, high proportion of jobs to homes, and numerous other polices all have an indirect impact on housing costs. Combined with the historic federal policies and the lack of opportunity to build generational wealth, high housing costs continue to impact who can afford to live in Boulder.

It is important to recognize the racial disparities in Boulder's demographics do not rest solely on zoning and housing policies. 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.¹⁰

⁵ Boulder County Commissioners' Resolution, agreeing to pay train fare for unemployed Mexican families to the border, May 18, 1932. Retrieved from: https://teachbocolatinohistory.colorado.edu

⁶ Silver, Christopher, The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications (1997)

⁷ Race: The Power of an Illusion Ep. 3 https://www.racepowerofanillusion.org/episodes/three

⁸ Babcock, Richard; Fred Bosselman, Exclusionary Zoning: Land Use Regulation and Housing in the 1970s. New York: Praeger Publishers (1973)

^{9 2019} Community Profile. The chart comparing the median sales price of detached and attached homes in Boulder shows a divergence between housing prices and income starting in 2012. A household needs to earn approximately \$200,000 a year to afford the median home price in Boulder (assuming 3.5% interest rate, typical homeowner expenses and the homeowner pays no more than 1/3 of their income on housing) https://www-static.bouldercolorado.gov.docs/Middle_Income_Housing_Strategy_October_2016-1-201611221422.pdf

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. 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 Boulder¹² 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. Despnite 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

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

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

Racial History of the City of Boulder, continued

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 1275¹³ "...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.

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

¹³ 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