



APRIL 16, 2022

Letter of apology to the early Chinese Immigrants and their descendants

The City of Denver sincerely apologizes to the early Chinese immigrants and their descendants and acknowledges its role in nearly a century of violence and discrimination, including the dismantling and destruction of Denver's historic Chinatown. The racial hostility and institutional inequities began with the arrival of the first Chinese immigrant workers in 1869 when they were forced to live and work in the segregated area of Chinatown, founded on Wazee Street between 15th and 17th Streets. Chinatown was one of several geographical ghettos that were created in the city to confine its "undesirable" residents. In later years, this discriminatory practice continued in the form of restrictive covenants in housing deeds along with "gentleman's agreements" to prevent "Orientals" from living and working wherever they wanted to in the city. Consequently, they were compelled to live in substandard housing and work in limited occupations.

Despite these discriminatory conditions, the early Chinese inhabitants of Denver's Chinatown developed a thriving working-class community that served as a safe and secure place for Chinese working in the city and the state as well as a commercial destination for other Denverites. Yet, irresponsible government reports regularly condemned it as a den of inequity and its inhabitants as conveyors of social diseases. Tragically, the anti-Chinese riot of October 31, 1880, nearly destroyed Chinatown, killed Look Young, a young laundryman, and wounded hundreds of others. The city police force failed to protect its Chinese residents from the violent mob that was intent on expelling them from the area. The city courts failed to punish the murderers of Look Young even though there were credible eyewitnesses to his beating and lynching. The city government failed to compensate Chinese residents for the damages to their property, estimated to be at least \$53,000 at the time.

In subsequent years, following the federal government mandated exclusion of Chinese workers from entering the United States in 1882, the city aggressively pursued a policy of harassing its Chinese residents in enforcing the immoral exclusion laws. Denver's police raided Chinatown, rounded up hundreds of Chinese residents in search of illegal aliens, finding very few. Many Chinese were forced to

move out of the city. As the number of Chinese residents declined, Chinatown was condemned as a blighted area and subjected to urban renewal.

As other Asian American and Pacific Islander communities moved into the area, they too were subjected to the same racial discrimination and social injustices faced by the Chinese immigrants. During World War II, for example, the city's licensing authority refused to grant business licenses to Japanese Americans outside of certain areas. After the war, the city failed to protect Japanese Americans from continuing racial bias when they experienced discrimination in certain occupational fields and were excluded from joining unions.

While the city cannot erase past injustices against Chinese immigrants and the Asian American and Pacific Island communities, the city owes them a long-overdue apology. An admission of the wrongs committed and its failure to correct them is a first step towards recognizing and honoring their contributions and can contribute to racial reconciliation. It will also serve to educate those who are ignorant of this shameful chapter in Colorado's history and hopefully bring some closure to the families whose loved ones suffered racial violence and abuse.

In doing so, Denver can deal with the continued consequences of past violence and discrimination such as the current surge in anti-Asian hate crimes sweeping the nation. As part of this process, the city is committed to supporting the establishment of an Asian Pacific Historic District, sponsoring the painting of public murals depicting the history and culture of Asian Pacific Coloradans, partnering on the development of a public education program about Asian Pacific Coloradans, and founding an Asian Pacific American community museum, which will be the first of its kind in the Rocky Mountain Region. All these actions will assist Denver to attain its goal of being a diverse, inclusive, and equitable city where all people can live and work in harmony.

Michael B. Hancock
Mayor