“THE HAPPIEST PLACE IN AMERICA IS BOULDER, COLORADO.”

-SAID NO BLACK PERSON EVER

THIS IS [NOT] WHO WE ARE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

WWW.THISISNOTWHOWEAREFILM.COM
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USING THIS GUIDE

This discussion guide supports groups and individuals who want to use This is [Not] Who We Are to stimulate conversation, reflection and engagement for themselves and their communities. It is intended to help deepen some of the content of the film and provide context and thoughtful questions. While the film is about one city -- Boulder, Colorado -- the issues in it resonate in communities around the United States. If you are watching with a group, we invite you to prepare a bit before you watch the film and to follow it with discussion and, if so moved, engaged action. Having a speaker from your group or community facilitate discussion can be very fruitful, and panel discussions allow for a more diverse, deeper exploration of the material. We also invite you to visit the film’s website, https://www.thisisnotwhowearefilm.com, to access more resources and information.
Beret E. Strong, Ph.D.

I spent childhood summers at my grandparents’ log cabin in the mountains west of Boulder, Colorado. I later returned to Boulder to raise a family with This is [Not] Who We Are film editor, John Tweedy. When our kids were grown, I embarked on an exploration of my personal relationship to race and racism. Though I wish I had started younger, I’m glad I took the crucial step of learning about our national history and painful legacy. I now believe that passivity is complicity in the context of ongoing racism in our country.

A few years ago, I realized I knew little about Boulder’s Black community. This is [Not] Who We Are foregrounds Black experience in Boulder, explores the making of a city, and shines a light on whether we white citizens live up to our progressive ideals of equity, inclusion, and belonging for all. I care especially about the well-being of our youth. Fortunately, many of us are working together toward positive change. We made this film not just for the people of Boulder but for those of other cities with struggles not unlike ours. Viewers who watch our film will, we hope, be moved to engage in self-reflection, productive dialogue, and transformational action wherever they live.

Katrina Miller

I started working in video production at 18. That passion brought me to Boulder where I had no idea what I was stepping into. Although the university had everything I wanted in terms of my education, it was isolating being the only Black person in the room everywhere I went. I felt like all eyes were on me, judging what I did and said as if to see if I did things differently because I am Black. It’s a world where you are never given the benefit of the doubt and anything you’re holding can be considered a weapon.

This film is my effort to explore the roots of a city that is not as progressive and happy as its view of itself. Denial also drives away Black talent. I want to overcome the culture of denial that keeps this white town homogeneous, drives out Black talent, and turns away prospective talent. I want this to be a safe place for my children and all children. I hope our film sparks deep conversations around belonging, inclusion, and leadership.

It was important to have most of the people in the film be Black because This is [Not] Who We Are is about our voices, which are usually silenced or given lower priority. We were determined to put Black perspectives at the forefront.
This is [Not] Who We Are is a documentary film exploring the gap between Boulder, Colorado’s progressive self-image and the lived experiences of its small but resilient Black community. Its throughline is the story of Zayd Atkinson, a university student who was performing his work study job cleaning up the grounds of his dorm when he was threatened by a police officer and, soon, by six officers with guns drawn. He lived to tell the story many Black men don’t survive to tell. The film is a weaving of many Black voices in the greater Boulder community, and the film subjects range in age from 12 to 78. The film also uses archival materials and oral history to explore the past, especially how a city that didn’t engage in redlining managed to create segregation by other means. Our multi-generational film includes a section of young people sharing their experiences with friends, in school, and with local police, all of which reveal that Black youth struggle to live in Boulder and may be motivated to leave as soon as they come of age.

Boulder is emblematic of liberal, white, university-based communities that profess an inclusive ethic but live a segregated reality. The film explores the interconnected issues of land use, affordability, racial and class-based segregation, educational equity, and policing. This is [Not] Who We Are shares the voices of Boulder’s Black community and shows how deeply the roots of institutional racism are embedded. The film celebrates aspects of the Black community here - from spirituality to cultural groups and activism. Finally, it explores ways in which we have the power to change our communities to create greater equity and diversity, and to help make all people feel a sense of true belonging.

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WE CREATE THE REALITY IN WHICH WE LIVE. THE ABSENCE OF DIVERSITY PROMOTES ISOLATION, AND THAT ISOLATION PROMOTES EXCLUSIVITY OF MIND, EXCLUSIVITY OF SPIRIT, OF BODY AND SPACE.

— Thomas Windham, Ph.D
FRAMING THE CONTEXT

Though communities in the United States have varied histories, many share a legacy of past and present forms of racial/ethnic exclusion or inequity. This is [Not] Who We Are illuminates how many of our communities were specifically planned to be exclusive and excluding. However, redlining, to bar non-white people from specific neighborhoods, was not the tool used in Boulder, Colorado. Boulder, the film’s “case study”, provides the story of an early decision by white settlers to privilege wealthy white people. Over time, early barriers to land ownership and home construction gave way to labor discrimination, social barriers for Black residents, and an inability for Black residents to get medical care.

In Boulder’s first 100 years, the white population rose dramatically while the Black population stayed low and even declined over time. The Black population finally rose substantially in the 1970s when the University of Colorado Boulder campus stopped being as overtly discriminatory. Black students could finally live in the dorms and be served at restaurants. Job opportunities for all grew as a result of federal science labs, IBM, and other industries moving into Boulder County. The 1970s were a special time for the Black community of Boulder, thanks to Black community service groups, Freedom School for Black children, and a lot of positive social activity.

Racially marginalizing behavior by the white community of Boulder continued, however, and continues to this day. The current landscape reveals that children and youth in Boulder’s public schools regularly have to hear other students use the N-word and deal with curriculum and teaching strategies that sometime make them feel uncomfortable. Policing in Boulder has revealed patterns of racial profiling, and the Boulder Police Department is working to remedy this. This is [Not] Who We Are reveals that we have not made our city and schools emotionally safe places. There is much work to be done to give all residents a sense of equity, inclusion, and belonging, and to create more demographic diversity in Boulder.
Elitism was built into the very foundation of Boulder, Colorado. In 1859, years before Colorado Territory became the state of Colorado, the Boulder Town Company was formed as a sort of gold mining support community. Prairie land was abundant elsewhere in the Territory. In many places, land was free or very low-cost. In the incipient town of Boulder, the land stolen from the Native Americans by means of breaking the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1851) was quickly divided into over 4000 lots priced at $1000 apiece. Cabins had to be constructed on a north-south axis. Chimneys had to be inside of cabins. Foundations had to be completed within seven days and entire dwellings within 60 days. This was an unsustainable model and, by 1864, the Town Company was headed for bankruptcy. Prices were forced to drop. In contrast, land was initially free in Denver, and then cost a lot less than in Boulder.

Black citizens arrived in Boulder as early as 1870. Over time, white citizens forced them into the neighborhood known as the Little Rectangle, though there was no official redlining in Boulder. Realtors and white residents’ behavior were enough to effect this segregation. Black resident population reached a high in 1910 with 166 Black residents. There were entrepreneurial Black businessmen, such as Oliver Toussaint (O.T.) Jackson, who briefly ran a hotel and operated the Chautauqua dining hall, but he was demoted and pushed aside in both of his roles.
The management of Chautauqua, which was dominated by people from Texas, replaced Jackson’s staff with an all-white staff. Job discrimination pushed many Black residents out of town. They often moved to Denver, where there was more opportunity. In the late 1920s, the neighborhood known as the multi-racial neighborhood known as the Jungle, where some of the poorest residents of Boulder resided, was demolished to make way for a civic center and large park along Boulder Creek. This was done on the advice of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who wrote: “Our object in all cases is to achieve Order, if possible a supreme instance of Order, which will be beautiful.” He wrote this in 1910, soon after his visit to Boulder, at a time when “Order” was a placeholder for ideas of racial segregation and eugenicist thinking. He advocated making Boulder a place that served the needs of the leisure class and tourists rather than those of working class residents.

By the mid-1920s, the Ku Klux Klan controlled the Colorado state legislature, voted in by the people of Boulder and Larimer Counties. The University of Colorado had a great impact on the city of Boulder, and Black residents were allowed to earn degrees there. However, they were discriminated against in various ways, from not being allowed to live in the university dormitories, student teach in Boulder’s public schools, enjoy local eateries that served students, or even swim in the university’s swimming pool except when the pool was about to be drained and refilled. This is [Not] Who We Are film subject Ruth Flowers, Ph.D., shares in her oral history that she couldn’t get a single doctor in town to care for her grandmother during a medical crisis. “It was really a closed society,” she states.
After World War II and the arrival of scientific laboratories and industry in Boulder, Boulder’s culture evolved enough to elect its first and only Black mayor, Penfield Tate II, in 1974. His son, attorney and former state legislator Penfield Tate III, speaks in *This is [Not] Who We Are* of his father’s legacy and how his father was drummed out of office for supporting a Human Relations ordinance that prohibited discrimination against people identifying as gay and lesbian. Starting in the late 1960s, Boulder chose to pay extra taxes to acquire large amounts of open space for “green space” and mountain parks. This had the effect of virtually encircling Boulder with land that could not be developed for housing.

Boulder began to gentrify rapidly starting in the 1980s and 1990s, driving up the price of housing and causing tens of thousands of people to commute to work in Boulder from outlying communities. Currently, it is estimated that around 50,000 people commute to Boulder every day, causing road congestion, air pollution, and the rising sense that over half of the city’s workers can’t afford to live there, including teachers, firefighters, and other essential workers.

Members of the Boulder community are working hard on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Specifically, the NAACP of Boulder County, the City of Boulder, the YWCA, and the Center for African and African American Studies at the University of Colorado are all engaged in initiatives. Many more informal groups and individuals are also working to remedy the problems revealed in *This is [Not] Who We Are* and to make Boulder a place where a diverse population can build community and thrive.
BACKGROUND ON FILM SUBJECTS

Zayd Atkinson, Naropa University Student

Zayd Atkinson is a 2022 Naropa University Alumni and local yoga instructor. He spent his undergraduate degree double majoring in Yoga studies and Environmental Science studies. These studies inspired his second thesis focusing on developing his ideas about social and environmental issues in America and how to integrate yogic principles into this field. He is currently instructing yoga in the Boulder area and has been working with NAACP to build relationships with CU Boulder and BIPOC Communities.

QUOTE: I’m probably going to end up staying here for a while. I feel like that’s how racism has always been overcome. It’s not like I’m just going to be like, “Oh, now I’m going to leave because you think I don’t belong here.” It’s like, “Nah, I’m here.” And subconsciously, that might have been some reasons why I remain.

Mahayla Rose: Dancer/Barista

Mahayla Rose is a dancer, DJ, and event coordinator. She is also founder of Lion Heart, which centers hip-hop and funk.

QUOTE: I didn’t go out there living, doing the craziest things or violent things or anything like that. But I was always the one to get in trouble — and not caught — but actually prosecuted, going to court, paying fines, paying tickets consistently for things that my white friends would get caught for the same thing and just let off, time and time again. So yeah, from a very young age, I’ve also felt like we really are just destined to get screwed.
Laura Anglin, Artist

Laura Anglin is a native of Boulder, Colorado. She has a BFA from the University of Colorado, Boulder. Her work is currently in private collections in Dallas, New York, San Diego, Denver, and San Francisco. She is an avid hiker, skier, dog lover, and Mom.

QUOTE: It’s just watching my son suffer has been terrible. The principal would call me and she would say, “Hey, it’s me again. Hey Laura, some kid insulted Vaughn and Vaughn retaliated, which I don’t blame him for, but school regulation says that we have to do this.” They didn’t seem to punish the person who was doing the hate speech, as opposed to punishing the victim. And getting him emotionally ready for the day after one of those events was extremely difficult.

Rev. Pedro S. Silva II, Minister and Nonprofit sector organizer and educator

Pedro S. Silva II is a a globally minded leader with extensive experience and depth in a variety of sectors. Throughout his career in military, corporate, and ministerial spaces, as well in volunteer work, he has inspired people, created compelling narrative, and articulated vision in ways that both challenge and comfort as required.

QUOTE: All of us could learn to love people more deeply by learning their stories instead of just taking our perspective on the limited amount that we know about their stories and thinking that that’s enough -- because it’s not enough. If you want to love me, then you need to hear my story. If I want to love you, I have to hear your story. And maybe they may be different perspectives on the same thing, but it’s a part of who we are. And I believe that if you get into any conversation with any person that’s different than you, and you come out of that conversation the exact same as you did when you went in, you were not participating in the conversation.

Reiland Rabaka, Ph.D., Educator

Dr. Reiland Rabaka is Professor of African, African American, and Caribbean Studies in the Department of Ethnic Studies; Founder and Director of the Center for African & African American Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder

QUOTE: We’re talking about repairing relationships. There’s something afoot in Boulder that is allowing us to not simply focus on what’s been done wrong -- the wrongdoing -- but what about the right doing? What about when you use your power, your privilege in a progressive way?
Penfield Tate III, Attorney and Former Colorado state legislator

Penfield Tate III grew up in Boulder, Colorado in the 1960s. He graduated from Colorado State University in 1978 with a degree in sociology. He earned a J. D. at the Antioch School of Law. Tate became an attorney based in Denver for the Federal Trade Commission. In 1997, he was elected to the Colorado State House of Representatives. In 2000, Tate was elected to serve the 33rd District in the Colorado State Senate.

QUOTE: You have to undo discrimination that occurs, whether it’s intentional or not. If you adopt policy and you see it’s doing harm towards people of color or people of certain economic strata, and you do not respond to address that impact, the question becomes, is that racism? Is that discriminatory? That is discriminatory. At a certain point, your inaction becomes intentional action to perpetuate the disparity that you know the policy is creating. You have to talk about the fact this policy works adversely towards Black people or Latinx people. We have to change the policy to get the result we intended.

Glenda Strong Robinson, Minister and Civil Rights Activist

When Glenda Strong Robinson was a 19-year-old junior at Memphis State University, she marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. She grew up in the Jim Crow South. She is very active in her ministry at the historic Second Baptist Church in Boulder.

QUOTE: There were several businesses on Water Street, aka Canyon, Black-owned businesses. Some white men from Texas and Oklahoma said, “What are you doing letting these colored people own these businesses? That’s not what you do.” And they ran them out of town. They put them out business and ran them out of town, the Black-owned businesses.
PLANNING YOUR EVENT

Types of events:

• Community screenings
• Educational and youth screenings
• Faith-based screenings
• Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging trainings (DEI)
• Corporate/business screenings
• Convention and conference screenings
• Local government screenings

Themes and topics:

• History of Boulder vs. history of your community
• Inclusive and positive communication among people: bridging differences
• Policing and racism
• Celebration of Black leadership and entrepreneurialism
• Housing and employment discrimination (and inclusion)
• Youth and their experiences of fairness and unfairness based on group memberships
• Racist speech in our schools
• Education and teaching of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging
• Racialized profiling and punishment
• Access to services that are Black-friendly and inclusive
• Microaggressions
• Resilience and overcoming

Modalities for your event:

• In-person screenings with discussion
• On-line screenings with follow-up discussion
• Activities and questions shared in advance for your group; then screen and discuss or otherwise work on the material
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILM

- What are your strongest emotional reactions to the film? What catalyzed these emotions? What thoughts are connected to these feelings?
- What surprised or shocked you?
- What did you learn from the film that you are glad to know? What information in the film would you wish that others know?
- What about the history of Boulder caught your interest, and why? How would you describe Boulder historically and now?
- How did your sense of Zayd’s story and experience evolve in the course of the film?
- What did you feel and think about the experiences of Celine, the young student bullied at school? What could help prevent what happened to her from happening to other children?
- How should parents and other adults talk to their children about differences among students, race/ethnicity and other issues, and how to create a sense of safety and belonging for all students?
- If you could ask anyone in the film a question, what would it be?
- Are you moved to take positive action in some way as a result of seeing this film? What are you moved to do? Can the film project support your effort in some way? (See the Resources page on https://www.thisisnotwhoweare.com)

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY

- What struck you about how the formation and history of a city can affect its future for a long time to come?
- What’s your sense of how Boulder’s story is relevant to other communities?
- What is your sense of community -- what values do you hold dear when it comes to living in community with others?
- How can we work toward having less racist communities where most or all people feel like they are welcome and have a sense of belonging? Is it possible to feel a sense of belonging if most of a community’s inhabitants do not look like you?
- What is “whiteness” like in your community? How does Boulder’s version of white culture impact people of other cultural/racial backgrounds? What about where you live?
- Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of the dream of building the “Beloved Community”. There are various views of what this is, but one is that everyone is cared for and there is no hate or poverty. Another is that there is love, acceptance, respect, and justice for everyone. What would a beloved community look and feel like to you? How could we build such a community?
- What’s the history of public spaces in your community? Were any diverse neighborhoods impacted by their development in beneficial or adverse ways?
- Who is doing equity and inclusion work in your community? What are their strategies?
QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

- How do you define “racism” and “bias”? How would you describe yourself in relationship to racism and bias?
- What do you think of when you hear or read about institutional/structural racism and interpersonal racism?
- What are your earliest memories about race/ethnicity? What messages did you receive and from whom? How did you feel about them and how did they affect you?
- What has been your experience in later life around issues of race and racism? What have you learned about discrimination historically and in the present? (You might consider employment, wealth, housing, policing/justice system, health care, education, financial system, safe neighborhoods, and pollution/access to healthy food and green spaces.)
- Have you felt mistreated or disrespected because of a personal characteristic (race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability/disability, immigration status, etc.)?
- What is your reaction to the term “white privilege”? If you are white, do feelings of defensiveness arise if someone says you are or your community benefits from unearned privilege in some way?
- What do you think of when you hear the term “white supremacy”?
- What happens when people apply different meanings to terms related to whiteness and racism?
- How do you think racism harms people, whether they identify as Black, other persons of color, or white? How can we remedy the harms?
- What would you specifically like to do to work on yourself, your community, or our nation to further racial and other forms of equity?
RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

DIALOGUE ACROSS DIFFERENCES

Join a Living Room Conversations group

“The motto of Living Room Conversations is respect, relate, connect. We know that in the pursuit of racial equity, individual conversations are not the final stop in the journey. Conversations can help us better understand individual bias and racism, as well as consider how racism is part of our systems and institutions.”

READ

- **My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies**, by Resmaa Menakam.
- **The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America**, by Richard Rothstein. Explores how various levels of government imposed racial segregation through redlining, disrupting historic neighborhoods, and wielding financial levers and the policing/judicial system to systemically segregate our nation.
- **Me and White Supremacy: A 28-Day Challenge to Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor**, by Layla F. Saad. This personal workbook helps the reader investigate how living in a culture full of white supremacy affects each of our thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- **White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack** and other essays, by Peggy McIntosh. Lists the ways she recognizes the way white privilege operates in her and our lives.
- **The Weaponization of Whiteness in Schools**, by Coshandra Dillard. Explores the role of whiteness in schools and offers examples of how educators can counter impulses to enforce it.
- **Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America**, by Ibram X. Kendi. A National Book Award winner that explores how ideas have been created and propagated over centuries to perpetuate the legacy of racism in the United States.
- **The Case for Reparations**, by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Explains how reparations entail much more than trying to make amends for enslavement.
- **The Injustice of This Moment Is not an ‘Aberration’**, by Michelle Alexander. Contextualizes the 2020 state of racism/white supremacy as an inevitable outcome of a collective narrative steeped in denial.
- **How White People Got Made**, by Quinn Norton. Tells the story of where the term “white people” comes from and which ethnic groups have and have not been able to become “white”.

This is [Not] Who We Are | Discussion Guide
WATCH & LISTEN

- **Do the Work Podcast** hosted by Brandon Kyle Goodman explores race and relationships. Each episode is an intimate conversation between two people who know each other well, and have had or are still having a struggle to cross the racial barrier. They have a real conversation about race, and reveal how we can all learn to be anti-racist in our daily lives.

- **Introducing: Nice White Parents** From Serial and New York Times, reporter Chana Joffe-Walt looks at the 60-year relationship between white parents and a local public school down the block. Includes reading list and discussion guide.

- **1619** A New York Times audio series, hosted by Nikole Hannah-Jones, that examines how slavery has transformed America, connecting past and present through the oldest form of storytelling.

- **Systemic Racism Explained** Act.TV animated short illustrates how systemic racism affects every area of U.S. from incarceration to predatory lending, and how we can solve it (4 mins)

- **White Backlash Against Progress: The 3rd Reconstruction** Rev. William Barber explains the challenges and opportunities in the 1st, 2nd, and now possibility 3rd reconstruction period (7 mins)

- **How ‘White Fragility’ Reinforces Racism** Dr. Robin DiAngelo explains what white fragility is and how it functions (5 minutes)

- **Racism is Real** A split-screen video depicting the differential in the white and Black lived experience (3 minutes)

- **I Didn’t Tell You** Ever wonder what a day in the life of a person of color is like? Listen to this poem, written and spoken by Norma Johnson (7 minutes)

- **CBS News Analysis: Students May Be Miseducation** About Black History Ibram X. Kendi reviews current history curriculum production and use across the U.S. (5 minutes)

- **The Disturbing History of the Suburbs** An Adam Ruins Everything episode that quickly and humorously educates how redlining came to be (6 minutes)

- **New York Times Op-Docs on Race** Multiple videos with a range of racial and ethnic perspectives on the lived experience of racism in the US (each video about 6 minutes)

- **White Bred** Excellent quick intro to how white supremacy shapes white lives and perception (5 minutes)

- **How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them** TED Talk by Vernā Myers, encourages work vigorously to counter balance bias by connecting with and learning about and from the groups we fear (19 minutes)

- **Racial Wealth Gap** Vox Explained series episode digging into why measuring racial progress must include understanding the roots and dynamics of the Black/white racial wealth gap (16 mins)
ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

- Collection of Anti-Racism Resources
- 106 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice
- Join a Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ) chapter in your area.

FOR CHILDREN

The Conscious Kid: Website | Twitter | Instagram | Facebook

Coretta Scott King Book Award Winners

EXPLORE ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR RESOURCES

Antiracism Center | Twitter | Instagram | Facebook

Color Of Change | Twitter | Instagram | Facebook

Colorlines | Twitter | Instagram | Facebook

Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) | Twitter | Instagram | Facebook

Teaching Tolerance | Twitter | Instagram | Facebook

Black Minds Matter | Twitter

18MillionRising | Twitter | Instagram | Facebook

Race Forward | Twitter | Instagram | Facebook

Racial Equity Tools | Twitter | Facebook
**CREDITS**

Beret E. Strong and Katrina Miller, Directors/Producers

John Tweedy, Editor

Stephanie Sunata, Graphic Design and Outreach Producer

Libby Carron, Social Media and Outreach Coordination

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Coronna and Samuel Family
Katrina Miller
Matt Maenpaa
Sketchfolio

To contact the filmmakers or to schedule a community screening:

[www.thisisnotwhowearefilm.com](http://www.thisisnotwhowearefilm.com)

To purchase for educational or institutional use:

Video Project

[www.videoproject.org](http://www.videoproject.org)

1-800-4-PLANET (1-800-475-2638)

Official film [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com) & [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com) or tag us @NotWhoWeAreFilm

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