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OPEN LETTER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOARD OF REGENTS

University of Colorado Board of Regents
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Dear Regents,

To briefly introduce myself, I am a 1983 graduate of the University of Colorado. My major was English, and the education I received at CU has served me well to this day. It is undeniable that I could have not had the myriad successful experiences that I've enjoyed without the rigorous instruction I received at CU. This past spring I had the pleasure of joining other alums in Washington, DC, to experience *CU Next*. With 33,000 students, it is clear that the university has established itself as a presence on the national stage. I am pleased to know that I will always be a Golden Buffalo: CU is my beloved alma mater.

But I must confess to having serious concerns about the direction that this university has taken in regards to the recruitment and retention of African American students, and so I am reaching out to you at this time so that my concerns can be shared with the University of Colorado Board of Regents, perhaps as early as this September's meeting.

To that end, I invite you to read further to gain insight into my observations of the university's current status.

May 2, 1977. A group of about two dozen African American, Latino, Native American, Asian, and White CU students carried out a 17-hour takeover of the Hellems Arts and Sciences Building in response to the University's plan to eliminate the Educational Opportunity Program – a program that made our being in Boulder possible. You will find little mention of the event in the annals of our institution.

I was one of those students.

Hellems appears to have been a turning point for CU, which over the next several years saw a decline in nonWhite enrollment. It also marked a turning point for me, as I moved on as a student, then as an activist, journalist, and educator. At every step, I dedicated myself to seeing that CU, and other similar institutions, do more than pay mere lip

service to the idea of racial inclusion of all while closing doors to promising nonWhite talent.

In April, 2018, I attended the University of Colorado's outreach program, *CU Next*, when it stopped in Washington, DC. My wife and I were inspired by the stories shared and the conversations held. It warmed our hearts to hear about CU President George Norlin, who defied the Ku Klux Klan and refused to fire CU's Jewish faculty and staff even when faced with a loss of state funding from a Klan-run legislature. We took great joy in speaking with our young DACA student, who overcame much just to get to CU. We were impressed with the perseverance of a young woman who overcame financial hardship. We learned of John Wooten and Franke Clarke, Black student athletes who were supported in 1956 by our university in the face of racial bigotry from Southern schools that would play CU in football only if they were not on the field.

But we were torn by the story of Lucile Berkeley Buchanan, a Black woman, denied the privilege to walk with her graduating class in 1918 (a decision likely made by an administrator whose name adorns one of our campus buildings), and how, a century later, she was now being honored. We were torn because of the fresh memory, in September 2017, of walking across the lovely Boulder campus as I reminisced with my wife (not a CU alum), and counting the number of Black faces we saw there on one hand--with fingers left over.

It bothered me from a personal standpoint because the stories of those wonderful *CU Next* students were the exceptions, not the rule.

An April 4, 2018 *New York Times* article, "Colleges Recruit at Richer, Whiter High Schools," shed some light on the gap between what has been *said* and what has been *done* when it comes to college recruiting. Colleges claim they cannot find enough qualified Black students. Researchers Ozan Jaquette, an assistant professor at UCLA, and Karina Salazar, a doctoral candidate at the University of Arizona, debunked many of the excuses colleges give about their decisions as to whom they recruit and why.

The link to their study can be found here: <http://emrresearch.org>

What Jaquette and Salazar found was that colleges like CU sought out students from high schools in more affluent and White neighborhoods while ignoring talented students in less affluent, less White areas.

The authors specifically cited CU's out-of-state recruiting practices as an example of admission representatives prioritizing wealthy, Whiter schools even when math scores were higher at the high schools they ignored.

Case-in-point: CU recruiters went to Boston's Dover-Sherborn Regional High School, (88 percent White, about 150 students with proficient math scores, according to the U.S. Department of Education). But CU passed over nearby Brockton High School (21 percent white, about 620 students meeting those same math standards).

Similar patterns were documented in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, St. Louis, Detroit, and Los Angeles, to name a few, where recruiters directly targeted schools that were richer and whiter, bypassing schools that were poorer and darker. In fact, Denver was the only city that hosted CU visits at high schools across the economic and racial spectrum.

Student enrollment has increased from about 20,000 at my alma mater since my freshman year in 1975, but the number of African American students is roughly half what it was then. Current CU enrollment is more than 33,000 students. African American student enrollment recently climbed back to just over 400. At one point in 1991, there were closer to 300 Black students.

Author Mary Kenyatta, critiquing a study on education and poverty in the *Harvard Educational Review*, rejected the current thinking that “ignores racial and class stratification.” She said such a mindset “is not designed to expand democratic participation of all U.S. citizens. Rather, it will continue to reproduce the race and class hierarchy that so many of us in education prefer to ignore.”

Kenyatta lamented that too many educators “use the euphemisms of disadvantaged children or neighborhoods ‘at risk’ in order to avoid teaching poor children and children of color. In many ways, these children have been written off as uneducable. The most we can do is to keep most of them locked in poor neighborhoods away from our more privileged children. We can let a few individuals in, but the masses of the poor will be left behind in a national policy that focuses on individuals who may or may not be recipients of charity.”

“For me,” she concluded, “that is not acceptable national policy. It is, rather, a recipe for disaster for the future of the United States and its citizens.”

Is this what we are witnessing on this flagship campus?

In his book, *Inequality in the Promised Land: Race, Resources, and Suburban Schooling*, R. L’Heureux Lewis-McCoy says that even in racially and economically diverse schools, there is unequal access to resources that create a more subtle opportunity gap that creates barriers for low-income, nonWhite students to stand out in the same ways as their peers.

There are many more low-income students of high academic talent than are being acknowledged, say Stanford University economics professor Caroline M. Hoxby and, Harvard University public policy professor Christopher Avery. They contend that colleges today appear to be “searching under the lamp post” for the small number of students that are visible, rather than searching “where the students are.”

CU can do better.

Chancellor Phil DiStefano, whom I had the honor of meeting at the Washington event, challenged his administration in 2014 to make the campus more reflective of Colorado's population by 2020. We can meet, if not exceed, the chancellor's call to provide young people of all backgrounds the opportunity to show what they can do, an opportunity to be the rule and not the exception.

CU can do even better than that. The University of Colorado prides itself on being a national and international institution of learning, one that opens its doors to the best and brightest regardless of where they come from. We actually need look no further than the **CU Vision Statement** which states:

"The University of Colorado will be a premier, accessible and transformative public university that provides a quality and affordable education with outstanding teaching, learning, research, service, and health care. Through collaboration, innovation, technology and entrepreneurship, CU will expand student success, diversity and the economic foundation of the State of Colorado."

But, beyond that, the visionary institutional consciousness of this university requires that we make continued forays into "uncharted territory" in order to uphold **The Colorado Creed** as well as the values demonstrated through application of the **Strategic Imperatives** of the **Inclusive Excellence Initiative**. The legwork of building the foundational values has been done. What remains is to simply to do what we say.

Who We Are:

CU Boulder is a leading global comprehensive research university. We are distinguished by an entrepreneurial mindset that shapes our teaching, research, and industry activities.

In all our actions, we are committed to inclusive excellence, a quality that defines our passion to be on the forefront of change for a more sustainable and understanding world.

The Colorado Creed:

As a member of the Boulder community and the University of Colorado Boulder, I agree to:

- 1. Act with honor, integrity and accountability in my interactions with students, faculty, staff and neighbors.*
- 2. Respect the rights of others and accept our differences.*
- 3. Contribute to the greater good of this community.*

These values are reinforced by our ***Inclusive Excellence Initiative***. CU Boulder's identity is defined by respect for diversity and inclusivity.

Strategic Imperatives

*Strategic Imperative 1: Shape Tomorrow's Leaders
Recruit, retain and graduate students committed to:*

- 1. Demonstrating honor, integrity, accountability, respect and contributions to the common good.*
- 2. Understanding, sharing and engaging diverse perspectives.*
- 3. Developing critical thinking and creative problem solving skills by fully participating in CU Boulder's academically rigorous programs and community.*
- 4. Recognize and engage graduates who consistently demonstrate CU Boulder values and apply intellectual curiosity, rigor and collaboration to creatively address complex issues and opportunities.*

Strategic Imperative 2: Be the Top University for Innovation

Serve as the nexus for innovation by facilitating collaboration and the sharing of diverse perspectives between universities, industry, laboratories and communities to elucidate and address complex issues and opportunities.

Strategic Imperative 3: Positively Impact Humanity

Broaden and expand research, scholarship and creative work and articulate the positive societal outcomes they advance.

Collaborate to produce graduates who apply their CU experience to make meaningful contributions to society.

Dr. Norlin once challenged our university to seek out the talented regardless of where they came from, who their parents were, or how much they could spend. He rejected those who urged discrimination, putting CU's very existence on the line. That is the kind of moral courage that we need today. He believed that we could be better. So, too, do I.

To that end, as part of my ongoing mission to support my university in living up to its creed, I am writing a book, tentatively titled ***The CU Black and Gold Project***. It is akin to an anthology, consisting of personal narratives of African Americans and detailing lives lived before, during and after CU Boulder. The book also includes tributes to Black CU alumni, faculty, and staff who have passed on. In telling our stories, stories that often go untold or are ignored when they are told, the point will be made that the inclusion of traditionally overlooked populations has made significant impacts on a world that has

benefited without often knowing the sources of its African American benefactors (former students, staff, employees).

Telling our stories is not an appeal for diversity. It is, and always has been, about finding and developing untapped talent, wherever it may be. We challenge the idea that “diversity” means little more accepting students who are not qualified to be on their campuses, rather than an opportunity to expand, explore, and grow.

I look forward to future conversations and an expanded, inclusive student body.

Sincerely,

James Michael Brodie