

*For more than 10,000 years, indigenous tribes would use the Gallatin Valley and Bridger Range during the Spring, Summer, and Fall months to hunt and forage. Over the next several thousand years, more and more tribes would use this land for hunting bison, elk, deer, and trade routes with neighboring tribes. In the late 15th century, a group of Europeans came to the shores of the Bahamas, forever changing the fate of what is now called the Americas and the first peoples who lived here. The colonization of this land would bring genocide that would continue for hundreds of years. During the course of that time, over 55 million indigenous people in the Americas would be slaughtered and/or fall to the diseases Europeans had brought over. By 1900, there would be fewer than 240,000 indigenous people in The United States. The land you stand on, the valley and mountains that spread out around us, are all part of that history.*

*In 1851, the Treaty of Fort Laramie was signed by the US Federal government and representatives of several, but not all, tribes including the Sioux, Crow, and Assiniboine. This treaty gave the US government and railroad surveyors the ability to enter tribal lands without repercussions, establish roads and military posts, and what amounted to continued westward colonialism. It promised the tribes a false narrative of protection from US citizens and commodities as payment. Payments that many tribes never received. In addition, it forced some tribes off of their territory, and placed them into the territory of neighboring tribes, creating increased competition for resources. As miners and settlers invaded indigenous lands, in part spurred by the gold rush in Colorado and Montana, many of the tribes who had signed the treaty were forced to move. White settlers, breaking the treaty, began to take over indigenous hunting grounds, slaughtering bison and other game, and sometimes through extreme violence and the backing of the US government, pushed the indigenous people off the land they relied on for survival. This valley was one of those hunting grounds, and Bozeman, the city most of us call home, was established by gold hunters during this period of continued incursion, forced removal, and genocide of indigenous people.*

*In the decades following the Montana gold rush, white settlers and the US military continued their invasion of tribal lands and genocide of the indigenous peoples. Today, indigenous nations control reservations, areas a fraction in size to their ancestral territories.*

*It is important to understand that despite what many people believe, indigenous people live in all parts of the country and all parts of this state. They are recovering from the genocide they faced for hundreds of years, and they are thriving. From attaining some of the highest positions in government, to advocating for local communities, to raising families, to fighting on the front lines of the pandemic to help save the lives of not only their own people, but the descendants of those who contributed to their near extermination. They are scientists, dancers, construction workers, artists, architects, teachers, doctors, spiritual leaders, and so much more. However, just because indigenous people are flourishing, doesn't mean they don't face marginalization, racism, and the aftermath of genocide, being violently forced from their land and homes, and erasure of much of their culture.*

*When we walk on this dirt and grass we walk on the homeland of indigenous peoples. Let us honor with gratitude the land and people who are the traditional stewards of this valley and surrounding mountains for countless generations: The Nu-we, known as The Shoshone, the Appasalooka, known as the crow, the Anishanabe, known as the Chippewa, the Ne Hiyawak, known as the Cree, the Niimi-pu, known as the Nez Perce, the A-a-ninin, known as the Gros Ventre, the Niitsitapi, also known as the Blackfeet, the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota also known as the Sioux, the Ktunaxa, known as the Kootenai, the Nakoda, known as the Assiniboine, the Sqelio, known as the Salish, the Tsis tsis'tas, known as the Northern Cheyenne, the Qaeisp'e, know as the Pend d'Oreille.*

*We must also remember that acknowledgments like this are not substitutes for accountability. It is important that each one of us works towards understanding the impacts colonialism has on indigenous people, and dismantling the ongoing legacies of racism, oppression, and inequity.*