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Black UNC Charlotte alumni series:
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Vol. 33, Issue 15

Feb. 16, 2021

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POLICE BLOTTER

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Photo by Niyathi Sulkunte

RE-ENTRY TESTING

UNC Charlotte gears up for Phase 2 of Covid-19 re-entry testing



NEWS

by Kathryn Caudill
Staff Writer

As students and faculty return to some in-person instruction on Feb. 22, UNC Charlotte will require COVID-19 re-entry testing to mitigate the virus's spread on campus. Those required to take the re-entry tests include anyone attending classes in person, living on campus, working on campus, those with meal plans, all faculty teaching in-person classes, and all faculty and staff that require regular attendance on campus.

The University offers free testing on-campus. However, students and staff can also elect to complete an off-campus test. Those who get off-campus testing must provide proof from a molecular PCR test. All tests need to be administered within 72 hours of the start of classes or return to residence halls.

There are two different testing phases. Phase 1 was completed in January and included students who received permission to move in early, students with meal plans using the plan before Feb. 22, students and employees of the English Training

Institute, employees whose jobs require close interaction with student living or dining, and students that required in-person participation such as nursing majors.

Testing conducted during Phase 2 will be from Feb. 17-22. Registration for on-campus testing is now available through StarMed, the University's partner for this testing, which you can access by texting "covid" to (833) 269-6396. Appointments are available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the specified dates. The testing will take place on the third floor of the Popp Martin Student Union, and free parking will be available in the Union parking decks. A 49er ID Card will be required to get tested on-campus, and StarMed will provide results via email or text. The University will also see the results. Participation in re-entry and mitigation testing, which is the testing of randomly selected students, faculty and staff throughout the semester, is required for being on campus for any purpose. If you do not meet these requirements, you will not be permitted to attend in-person classes or utilize any other

campus locations. Mitigation testing will consist of randomly selected groups with email with instructions. As the selections are random, you might be selected multiple times and participation is required every time.

If you are exempt from testing, you do not need to file a separate exemption form for mitigation testing. Exemptions to testing include medical conditions, bona fide religious belief and a positive COVID-19 test within the last three months.

While awaiting your test results, you may continue to go on campus following all mask and distancing protocols, as long as you have not been in close contact with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 and show no symptoms. When completing Niner Health Checks, you should select that you are awaiting results, and under "reason why," you should select "Mitigation or Re-entry Testing."

If you test positive, the University will instruct you to self-isolate for a minimum of 10 days will be emailed to you. The University will also

provide housing to any on-campus student who does test positive. Off-campus students and faculty will need to self-isolate at private residences. The University's tracing team will contact those who do test positive for COVID-19 to notify close contacts.

Due to the county's extended health directive through Feb. 28, staff have been encouraged to continue to work from home until Feb. 22. The University can randomly select employees (including students) who visit campus regularly for mitigation testing throughout the semester.

PHASE 2
TESTING WILL BE
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Photo of CHHS Plaza, by Niyathi Sulkunte

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T.J. Reddy

Remembering influential Black
UNC Charlotte alumni

by Jessica Ceballos
Asst. News Editor

This article is part of a large series established by the Niner Times news section in order to celebrate UNC Charlotte's influential Black alumni.

Thomas James Reddy, known as T.J. Reddy, is a UNC Charlotte alumnus who helped in founding the University's Black Student Union and Africana Studies Department. The Department of Africana Studies staff page remembers him as "an African American Social Realist painter who constructs mixed media paintings with acrylics and natural materials" and a "creator and coordinator of murals and public art projects." He was also known for his poetry, political activism and membership in the Charlotte Three alongside Charles Parker and Jim Grant, who were all charged with arson of the Lazy B stables. Reddy was sentenced to 20 years in prison and later had his sentence commuted.

Reddy was born in Savannah, Ga., on June 8, 1945, and died



Photo courtesy of Tina Wright via uncc.edu

on March 31, 2019, in Charlotte, North Carolina. According to the Biographical/Historical section in the Reddy papers, he was a poet consultant and an associate editor of the arts magazine, Three. He also won the LeGette Blythe Creative Writing Award in 1969. Reddy published two poetry books, *Less Than a Score, But a Point* in 1974 and *Poems in One Part Harmony* in 1979. He received the Kwanja Award for Creativity in 1978 and the North Carolina Conference of Black Studies Service Award.

Reddy transferred to UNC Charlotte in 1967 from Johnson C. Smith University and graduated in 1974 with a B.A. in history and sociology and a Master's Degree in Education in 1977. Reddy assisted in founding the Black Student Union (BSU) and what was then called the African and Afro-American Studies Department at UNC Charlotte. In an oral interview conducted in 2004 by

Lois Stickell, Reddy recalled when the BSU issued ten demands for the university administration to change and raised their black flag on the campus flagpole.

According to the Biographical/Historical section in the Reddy papers, while at Charlotte, Reddy participated in the Civil Rights Movement, protesting the Vietnam War and specifically the U.S. government's recruiting methods by distributing anti-draft leaflets. He also protested segregation and racial inequality.

Reddy was featured on the Storied Charlotte webpage on June 6, 2020, by Mark West. On July 20, 2017, UNC Charlotte held an opening reception for T. J. Reddy as a way to honor him and display his art exhibition "Everything is Everything." After Reddy's death, UNC Charlotte held a virtual event to celebrate the life of T.J. Reddy. A recording of the evening is posted on this webpage.



OPINION

Digital Blackface

The importance of dismantling racism in social media

by Abena Atiemo
Intern

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a culturally significant form of English with its own unique grammar, vocabulary and specific traits found in the accent. It derives from the non-standard English that settlers had in the southern United States. There are also similarities between African creole languages and West African languages. Today, AAVE has begun to take a main stage spot in our current digital discourse.

If you frequently use Twitter, Instagram or any popular social media site, you may have noticed that slang can invoke a comedic reaction. This slang has been misattributed to different subgroups online. It has been called “Stan Twitter speak” or “meme speak,” but it is hard to ignore the direct parallels that these so-called “new” slang words and phrases have with AAVE. For example, the words “lit,” “turnt,” and “tea” all have origins with AAVE. Many people use Gifs to express themselves on Twitter, but the only gifs used in a humorous context are those featuring Black people.

Combine the watering-down of AAVE with the overuse of Black people’s faces in GIFS, and you now

have digital blackface. It is taking the black form and warping it into something entertaining. It seems like a harsh verdict for something seemingly so harmless, right? When we look at why people tend to use the images they do, disturbing problems begin to unravel themselves.

Our blackness isn’t something that we can put on and take off whenever we feel like it. It is something that embodies us, something that we carry with pride. It is also the same thing that society wields against us. In the summer of 2020, we saw the consequences of this. The deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Oluwatoyin Salau and George Floyd are a few examples of Black people whose lives were cut short at the hands of anti-blackness. Black people live in this reality. It has existed long before the media began to talk about it in the mainstream and needs emphasis. People who take parts of the Black experience, the “cool” and “in-fashion” parts of blackness, remove it from its cultural context and consume it however they please. When it is time to be Black, live under systematic oppression and fight for the right to live, these same people discard it as fast as they pick

it up. AAVE is something non-Black people use to be relevant or funny. For Black folks, it is simply a way to communicate, a way of life.

When looking at GIF and image usage, it’s easy to say that it’s all coincidence. You might be thinking: “These pictures are funny because of the inside jokes behind them!” and to an extent, you’d be right, but many of these images also have tragic backstories behind the pixels. The most egregious example being the story of D’Arreion Nuriyah Toles. After returning to his apartment complex one night, someone physically prevented him from entering his home. Toles was called “suspicious” by a white neighbor, and after he faced harassment, he filmed the interaction and posted it to Facebook. It quickly caught media attention. After going viral, racist trolls turned a selfie he had posted three years prior into the “I may not show it...” meme. The meme’s format usually has the top caption as, “I may not show it,” and an ironic caption at the bottom. The emergence of this meme turned Toles into the butt of the joke and trivialized his experience.

The point of this isn’t to say

that we need to police every non-Black person’s movement online (or off); instead, we should have a conversation on what we deem as funny or trendy. How come Black people in almost any state of being, whether sad (crying Jordan meme) or in a generally serious moment (Sheryl Underwood taking off her wig), are still seen as funny? Why is it “hip” to use AAVE in regular conversation when it is not your linguistic trait? It is not an exaggeration to say that almost every part of the Black experience has become commodified. Pictures of Black people just existing have been turned into jokes for non-Black people to consume. It may seem like a frivolous conversation on the surface, but for Black people who live just as they are, to have your way of life turn into the next hot item or funny image can be a degrading experience. Hypervisibility is not justice.

Digital blackface. Add it to your lexicon. Analyze the deeper threads behind your actions and the larger consequences they may perpetuate. We all have a role in dismantling racism and anti-Blackness, even with the smallest of PNGs.



by Sam Perry
Intern

The Boys Are Back

After a long wait, Charlotte baseball returns to the diamond

The Charlotte 49ers baseball team this season is led by Head Coach Robert Woodard, who is looking to complete his first full season as head coach. When looking ahead to a new season, Woodard said, “I really can’t wait, to be honest with you.”

Charlotte opens up their season with a three-game series with Morehead State on Feb. 19 at Hayes Stadium.

The impact of abruptly losing the season last year was a tough pill for Woodard and the team to swallow. Losing last season “was a total shock effect,” however, Woodard said they are “gonna really enjoy the game more this spring.”

Having to tell the players the season was over last year was “not something you (Woodard) prepared to do.” He also went on to say, “from that day forward, our staff and players have taken on the mantra of, control what we can control.”

Due to not having as much of a season during the fall, Woodard was unsure what he had with 19 veterans and 27 new players.

“Every day is that much more important... and has been a day for us to come together and become one team,” said Woodard.

New Pitching Methods

With the collegiate summer league’s uncertainty last year, the team sent 18 of its pitchers to Premier Pitching Performance (P3) training in St. Louis. Woodard said they wanted to make “sure our pitchers are as prepared as they possibly can be.” Woodard had discovered P3 when recruiting as the pitching coach for the Carolina Tarheels Baseball team. “(I) noticed strong levels of improvement with our pitching staff not just physically but mentally as well,” Woodard said.

This season will be different for the pitching staff due to all Conference USA (C-USA) series being four games instead of the usual three.

“It’s gonna challenge our depth,” said Woodard. (We’re) gonna need guys to be flexible in their roles.” Woodard plans to combat this obstacle through whatever means necessary.

Players to Watch

Woodard said they “got a good core group of position-players.”

Along with Dominic Pilolli, David McCabe and veterans Todd Elwood and Rafi Vasquez, Charlotte’s batting order looks dangerous this year.

Dominic Pilolli is a left-handed outfielder who bats .403 while driving in 14 RBIs last season. He was a C-USA hitter of the week for the week of Feb. 24 last season.

David McCabe is a switch-hitting infielder. Woodard said he is “one of our best defenders no matter where you play him at.” McCabe batted .238 last season, knocking in 9 RBIs.

Todd Elwood is a left-handed outfielder in his senior season. Woodard said, “has been a catalyst in this program for several years.” Elwood bolsters a career .306 batting average and drives in 42 RBIs in his time with the program.

Rafi Vasquez is a left-handed infielder who possesses “serious power,” according to Woodard. He has batted .281 with 57 RBIs in his career here at Charlotte.

Pitchers to Watch

The pitching staff’s expectation is for the starters to be the focal point of strength. Woodard said, “I hope and like to think we will have this starting rotation every year,” but admitted it is a talented rotation and will be tough to match.

Bryce McGowan and Christian Lothes, along with incoming Junior College (JUCO) players Andrew Lindsey and Austin Marozas, are expected to start. However, veteran Matt Brooks and freshman Spencer Giesting may make a starting appearance.

Bryce McGowan is going into his third season with the 49ers. His pitching repertoire includes a 97 mph fastball, a changeup and slider that he has developed this past summer working at P3. McGowan is ranked as C-USA’s number one draft prospect this season and is ranked #58 of draft prospects out of college, according to d1baseball.com. According to Woodard, he will be the primary starter this season for the team.

Christian Lothes is coming off an injured freshman season after pitching only 2.2 innings of work before the season’s cancellation. Woodard expected him to be a major contributor last year and be a significant contributor this season in the starting rotation. He has a fastball topping out at 96 mph with a slider in the low to mid-80s. Woodard said he “probably added 30 lbs of pure strength.”

Matt Brooks is a redshirt-junior who was formerly Charlotte’s Friday night starter before being hurt last season. Woodard said, “who’s just an incredible

story, has come back from a challenging shoulder injury.” He had a 3-0 record with 21 strikeouts in 20.1 innings pitched. Brooks was a former Conference USA All-Freshman Team member in 2017.

Spencer Giesting is a freshman pitcher from Hamilton, Ohio. Woodard said Giesting is a “really talented left-handed pitcher.”

Andrew Roach is a returning junior right-handed pitcher. Last season in four starts, Roach had a 2-2 record with 22 strikeouts on 22.2 innings pitched. He is “probably our most consistent pitcher who has a knack for getting outs and missing the barrel while being a big-time competitor,” said Woodard.

Season Expectations

Being Woodard’s first full season as head coach, the 49ers will be facing some tough opponents this season. They are going up against 19th ranked Tennessee, 25th ranked East Carolina, 17th ranked Wake Forest and the always dangerous North Carolina.

Woodard said the goals for the season are to “try to develop our guys to the best of our ability, and work as hard as we possibly can to prepare them as best we can.”

Another goal the Woodard told his players not to “plan on being the same team on June 19 that we are on Feb. 19, the plan is to continue to develop over the course of the spring.”

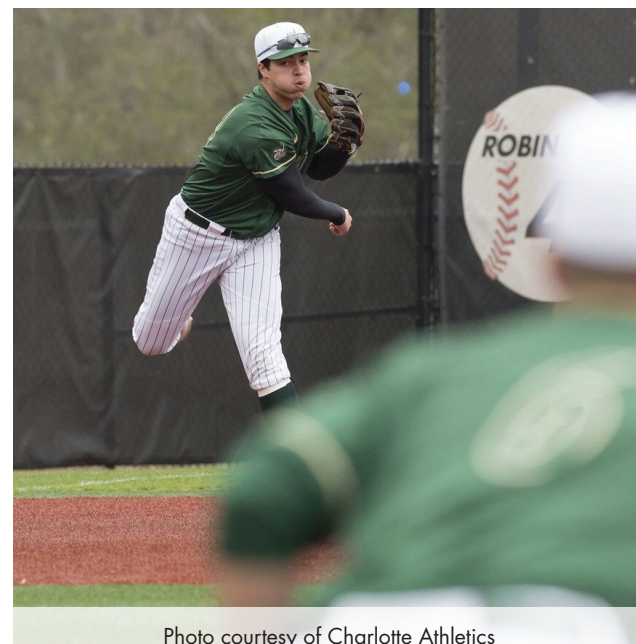


Photo courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

Valuable Leader

Charlotte basketball's Jordan Shepherd has provided leadership and talent in 2021

by Cameron Williams
Staff Writer

Charlotte men's basketball player Jordan Shepherd is fulfilling a big role this year and has already become a household name for the 49ers.

Shepherd has shown leadership on and off the court this year.

2020 was hard for all athletes across the country, and a young Charlotte team needs a leader. They needed someone who could keep them all disciplined and focused on the team's goals.

Early Days

Growing up, Shepherd always knew he loved the game of basketball. He played games with his dad and also watched his dad intently while he played.

"I come from a family of athletes, and my dad would take me to the courts with him, and I would watch him play, so I think that is where my love started for the game...my dad is my hero," said Shepherd.

Shepherd played high school basketball at Asheville Christian Academy, wherein his senior year, he averaged 19.2 points per game along with 5.1 assists and 5.1 rebounds per game. He went on to win the Carolina's Athletic Association player of the year honors and All-State honors.

247sports had Shepherd ranked as the 313 best players in the country, 61st point guard and 14th in North Carolina. Shepherd put these rankings in perspective and used them to drive him to be better.

"Early on, I looked at them (the player rankings) a lot, but as I got older, towards my junior and senior year, I tried not to pay attention to them as much because sometimes they can be a little wrong," said Shepherd.

Oklahoma Stint

Shepherd committed to The University of Oklahoma in 2016, where he played for Coach Lon



Photo of Jordan Shepherd shooting the ball in a game against FIU, by Chris Crews.

Kruger. Shepherd saw action in all 59 games he played with the Sooners, getting starts in four of those games.

In the 2017-18 season, the team got up to number four in the nation and made the NCAA tournament. As a part of the 2017 recruiting class for the Sooners, they brought in point guard Trae Young, who is now a member of the Atlanta Hawks in the NBA.

"Playing with Trae was a great experience that I don't take for granted at all," said Shepherd. "Being older than him, I was teaching him the ways of school and the ways of life a little bit. We learned a lot from each other."

Shepherd took the lessons he learned from this experience and applied them to how he plays now as the leader of the 49ers.

Natural Leader

After Shepherd served a redshirt season due to the NCAA's transfer protocols, he started in all 27 games for the 49ers in the 2019-20 season. As a redshirt junior, he took the younger guys under his wing and assisted them in their early days as college players.

college freshman and sophomore," said Sanchez of Shepherd. "I think that's where his leadership comes into play."

As he has grown into the player and leader he is today, Shepherd hasn't always seen great leadership in programs he has played for in the past, and he feels that coach Sanchez brings that component each day.

"He challenges me to lead and to be better. I can learn as I go, how to become a better leader and share my experiences with the younger guys," said Shepherd.

Leading during a pandemic

COVID-19 has plagued the sports world and has changed sports.

It has canceled entire seasons for spring athletes and canceled most conference basketball tournaments, including the C-USA tournament in which Charlotte had the four seed.

Each move that an athlete makes could make or break them being able to play each week.

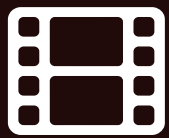
It has been challenging, but Shepherd has focused on being an example to his team.

"It is my senior year, so it would be easy to be selfish, but for the betterment of the team, I set my own goals aside so the team can have success," said Shepherd.

The sports world doesn't see this kind of selflessness all the time. Saying with authority that he sets his own goals aside for the team's betterment says a lot about his character. It is a leadership trait that is irreplaceable.

"There is a cost to winning," added Shepherd.

Shepherd's discipline and being an ongoing "student of the game" has helped him succeed on the court as the guard has averaged 34.1 minutes a game along with 11.4 points.



A&E

JUDAS — AND THE — BLACK MESSIAH

A mirror to the past that looks a little too familiar

by Gabe Lapalombella
Staff Writer

Photo courtesy of
Warner Bros. Pictures

If that subheading concerned you about this review being political, don't worry. I only say that to show that this is a film that is effective in what it wants audiences to think about. We follow Fred Hampton's story (Daniel Kaluuya), the Illinois chairman of The Black Panther Party, and the infiltration of FBI informant William O'Neal (LaKeith Stanfield). Even if you know Hampton's story, I want to give a bit of a warning. In Hampton's quest for equality for all, we see and hear about many brutal incidents in the past. I won't spoil what those are if you don't know the history, but please know that the film can be tough to watch. Thankfully our performances are so strong here that they immediately hook the audience.

As William O'Neal, Stanfield has to draw a tough line in the sand for this character. As someone working to take down a revolutionary, some might ask how you could sympathize with him. Because of an actor like him, while we are meeting him

stealing cars and impersonating a federal agent, we feel for his situation. His interactions with an FBI agent (Jesse Plemons) immediately makes us tense up as an audience because we don't know what could happen. Being set in a time of severe racial division, we fear for him getting out of this harrowing situation alive. It's the sort of performance that requires him to play multiple versions of the same character, and Stanfield does so with ease.

Once he infiltrates the Panthers, we meet Kaluuya in his truly revelatory performance as Hampton. Having seen the film twice now and watching Hampton's actual footage, Kaluuya emulates who this man was. From the voice to the effect he had on those around him, he displays why Hampton was as influential of a figure as he was. Going from being a hopeful family man with his wife Deborah Johnson (Dominique Fishback) to a revolutionary, it's a

flawless balance. There's a particular sequence where he gives a speech to the unified parties; he will give you chills. That feeling stuck with me throughout both viewings, and I think it will do the same for everyone. There's only one other performance that wowed me in from 2020 (review on that film soon), but it's stiff competition with this one.

The third star of the film is director Shaka King, who looks at the history of this day and age. What the filmmaker gets so entirely is the attention to details in the past. Having the privilege to sit in on a Q&A with the cast, director and Fred Hampton Jr., I was amazed at how accurate the film was. In most of these types of true-life stories, there are individual creative liberties. While there may be some here, it certainly didn't feel that way. There's great attention to period detail of the time, which may even reflect what we see in the world today.

"Judas and The Black Messiah" is a flawless piece of filmmaking. Though an acted film, some moments feel like a documentary. Add in a rich, specific, and timely soundtrack you feel like you're seeing a glimpse of Chicago in the 80s. Throw in two of the most revelatory performances of the year, and you won't be disappointed. Even in Fishback, Plemons, and Martin Sheen's supporting performances in two scenes as J Edgar Hoover, nothing feels performed. It's a rare feat to accomplish, but King delivers on a film that will make us think but, most importantly, feel.

Rating: **5/5**

Frank Ocean's **nostalgia, ULTRA.**

*Ten
Years
Later*

A prelude to one of the most talented and compelling musicians of the 2010s

by Arik Miguel
Staff Writer

Frank Ocean's impact is difficult to express fully. His stunning voice, storytelling abilities, and ability to express emotions in the most relatable way have made him universally loved. His creativity has certainly impacted pop, indie, and rap over the last decade, and sad-boy R&B knockoffs are constantly popping up, attempting to replicate his sound and persona. With someone with the endless creativity and seemingly natural talent of Frank Ocean, replication is almost impossible. Even "nostalgia, ULTRA," Ocean's breakthrough mixtape from 2011, still sounds remarkably fresh ten years later. All the hallmarks of a classic Frank Ocean release are present, and looking back, it truly seems like the sound of a musical genius on the cusp of something great.

While Frank Ocean was working with rap collective Odd Future, he recorded "nostalgia, ULTRA" and self-released the collection of songs on Feb. 11, 2011, on his Tumblr account with no promotion. The fact that a self-released unpromoted mixtape on an online blogging platform could catch the attention of superstar artists like Jay-Z, Beyoncé, and Kanye West speaks volumes about the quality of the music. Frank Ocean's songwriting brand seems so entrenched in popular culture that it can be difficult to think about how incredibly compelling his music first was.

The songwriting exists in a wonderful limbo state between the real and fictitious. Frank Ocean

would fully fine-tune this later in his career. However, many songs on this mixtape still capture a specific bright and youthful understanding of the world that expresses melancholy, joy, longing, and almost every emotion imaginable. "Novacane," the first single from the mixtape, tells a nightmarish love story of doing drugs and meeting a girl at Coachella. Now a classic Frank Ocean song, the story of meeting a "model broad with the Hollywood smile" and sly film references like "been tryna film pleasure with my eyes wide shut" still stands up as a uniquely crafted song full of intention and artistry.

Mixtapes are always interesting because of the freedom they express. They often feature overt samples of popular songs that would never get cleared for an official album. Frank Ocean included some incredibly memorable covers and samples that expressed nostalgia and the wide span of his music taste. A lowkey Radiohead sample on the interlude "Bitches Talkin'" is cheekily overlaid with women asking, "What is a Radiohead?" "Strawberry Swing" covers the underrated Coldplay song—a bold and risky move that few artists besides Frank Ocean could pull off. "American Wedding" is essentially a cover of the classic "Hotel California" with new lyrics. The song led to a threat of a class-action lawsuit, which never really reached fruition.

Frank Ocean's love for movies is something that we are now all aware of (most notably Channel

Orange's "Forrest Gump"), but this mixtape is when we were first introduced to the musician's love for film. The outro of "Lovecrimes" features a large portion of Nicole Kidman's dialogue in Stanley Kubrick's 1999 film "Eyes Wide Shut." It captures Frank Ocean's desire to embody and expand upon other people's stories. It is also wonderfully memorable and unlike what was happening in a lot of other music at the time.

Two songs capture the two emotional poles of the mixtape. "There Will Be Tears" is full of emotion and pushes the normative R&B sound towards a more interesting indie style. It also features a cathartic release of sadness and a tear-jerking expression of having an absent father. The other side of the album can be seen in the closing track. "Nature Feels" heavily samples MGMT's "Electric Feel," but transforms it into something even more alien, and psychedelic in its own natural way. A nostalgia-inducing and lust-filled retelling of the story of Adam and Eve, but transported "underneath the cherry leaves." It ends the mixtape on a colorful and mind-expanding finale. It fully announces the voice of a gifted songwriter, a ruthless perfectionist, and someone who seems able to push conventions with every breath. Everything on this mixtape felt fresh and unique at the time, and now with a larger body of Frank Ocean songs and a slew of copycats and inspirations, this jumping-off point feels truly nostalgic in ways Frank Ocean probably could not imagine.

What is NT listening to?

Hello! My name is Madison Dobrzanski, and I am the Editor-in-Chief of the Niner Times. Similar to most people, my music taste includes several genres and artists. I listen to a lot of rock, alternative, Broadway show tunes, and rap. However, I want to share my most recent discovery about myself: I love pop music. I love music that I was shamed for loving when I was 14. I'm sure you remember a time when it was so frowned upon to like anything that was "popular." Because of that shame, I denied myself artists like Halsey, Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez, Ariana Grande, Miley Cyrus, Beyoncé, and Taylor Swift. A combination of wanting to be cool and fearing being "basic" stole pop music from me. Thankfully, we have mostly moved on from shaming "basic" tastes—so I have been taking pop music back for myself. I compiled a short playlist of pop music, new and old, by artists that you may have been embarrassed to like for the same reasons I was. This playlist is short but I hope it teaches you to question the tastes that you once considered "basic," and realize that maybe...just maybe...some things are popular because they're good and fun! Enjoy!





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LIFESTYLE



COLLARED DOLLAR

A story of good during a pandemic

by Lesly Santos
Intern

COVID-19 has changed the world indefinitely, especially in retail workspaces. I work at a huge retailer and we meet so many different people that have different ideas about the pandemic. We, as many businesses do, enforce the mandate to wear masks and practice social distancing.

Two elderly women came to shop while I was working alongside my two co-workers folding clothes and restocking merchandise. The two women approached the area around me and began browsing the different styles and conversing about them. One was wearing her mask, but it had made its way down to her chin. She began walking towards me to ask me about the sizing of the clothes, and my co-workers immediately scattered and made their way across the sales floor. I simply maintained my distance and answered her questions. Her friend then told her to pull her mask up and cover her nose. She eventually did after a few moments.

Her friend then came up to me and asked me where they could find patterned masks. I walked with them to the area where we had all of our cloth masks. Once there, the woman's friend told

me her friend gets a little confused sometimes and apologized for her not having the mask on properly. I told her it was no issue at all, but it was important for her to be safe in these times. She then came closer to me and thanked me for helping them. She witnessed my co-workers bluntly walk away from them and make no attempt to help them. I apologized on their behalf and told her if she needed any more help to let me know.

Before I left them to browse through the masks, she stopped me and thanked me once again. She handed me a dollar that was folded up like a collared shirt. She told me that she folds dollar bills into collared shirts and gives them to people that have good intentions and are kind to her and her friend. I told her to keep the dollar and that I wasn't looking for any sort of compensation from them. She took my hand and gave me the dollar and told me that "In God, We Trust"—which was clearly printed on the right side of the shirt—and if I ever felt any doubt in myself to just look at the dollar and remember He has a plan for me.

I walked away, thanking her for the dollar and her kindness. My co-worker saw the woman give

me the dollar and began telling me she would've helped if she knew money was involved. I was more shocked at the fact that the woman thanked me than I was with the dollar itself. It is not often that a person genuinely thanks you for helping them, especially in a retail job. I told my co-worker that it wasn't about the money but just the fact that they were really nice and respectful.

My co-workers shouldn't have walked away and then say that they would've helped if they knew they would get money. I tend to be more patient with people, especially the elderly because I hope that when I get older, there will be someone kind enough to help me. I want people to feel comfortable and respected because we never know what they have going on at home. I only interact with people briefly when they shop at my workplace, and if I can make them smile, then I consider it to be a good day. To this day, I still have that dollar in my wallet. I consider it to be my lucky dollar.

NINER TIMES TRIES VIRAL TIKTOK PASTA

by Emily Kottak
Lifestyle Editor

This recipe has been blowing up on TikTok—likely because everyone loves pasta and everyone loves easy recipes. This pasta recipe is extremely simple, only requiring a few ingredients but producing an exorbitant amount of flavor. After seeing this recipe on my “For You” page multiple times, I decided it was time to try it myself and see if it was really worth all of the excitement.

Ingredients:

Pasta of your choice (I used tricolor bowtie noodles)

A block of feta cheese

Cherry tomatoes

Olive oil

Salt and pepper

Oregano

I absolutely love pasta and feta cheese, but don’t typically eat pasta with creamy sauces. Instead, I prefer tomato-based sauces. However, this recipe offers a bit of both which I think is good for all pasta lovers.

Directions:

Start by taking a glass baking dish and covering the bottom with a coat of olive oil.

Add cherry tomatoes so that it covers the bottom of the dish and stir with spatula so the tomatoes are coated in olive oil.

Add block of feta into the middle of the dish and drizzle a bit more olive oil.

Sprinkle salt, pepper and oregano on top of dish.

Place in the oven at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.

Once done, stir so that the feta melts and the sauce becomes creamy.

Pour sauce over pasta and stir together.

Enjoy!

I realize I did not use exact measurements for this recipe but that is because it is not necessary to do so. There are many variations of this recipe circulating throughout TikTok. My best advice is to watch several videos of the recipe to see which one sounds the most appealing to you. I followed TikTok user’s “traderjoesfoodreviews” recipe.

When I got the dish out of the oven, it smelled heavenly. However, it looked very oily (to be expected when using quite a bit of olive oil). I generally try to avoid rich, creamy and greasy food. So maybe this dish wasn’t the best choice because it encompasses most of those traits. However, I still decided to try it out.

The first few bites of this dish were heavenly. Though not much seasoning or ingredients were used, the dish was bursting with flavors. However, after the next few bites, the richness and creaminess became a bit too much. I felt like the pasta noodles were being completely absorbed and

swallowed by the sauce to where I could barely even taste the noodles. For those who enjoy cream-based sauces with their pasta, this dish is perfect. For those who prefer tomato-based sauces and try to avoid rich and creamy sauces, this is not a good choice.

For me personally, I enjoyed the simplicity of this recipe and the idea of it sounded great. However, after the first few bites, I found it to be too rich and creamy for my liking and feared a stomach ache if I continued to indulge. I’m still glad I tried the

recipe though. TikTok users are constantly posting and raving about delicious and simple recipes. The only way to know if it is really worth the hype and attention is to try it yourself.

Rating



Photo of TikTok pasta by Emily Kottak