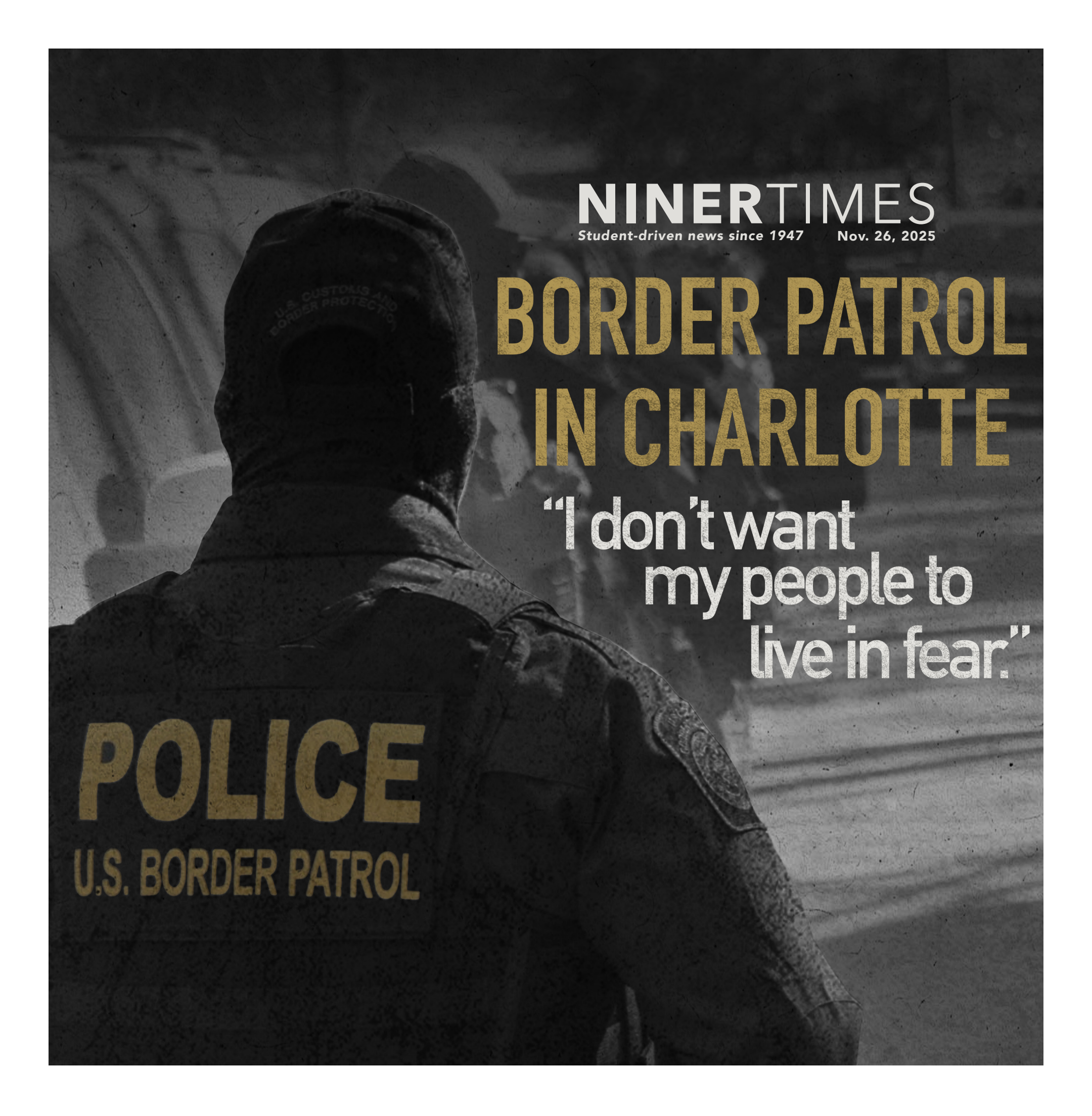




NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947

Nov. 26, 2025

BORDER PATROL IN CHARLOTTE

“I don’t want
my people to
live in fear.”

POLICE

U.S. BORDER PATROL

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The Niner Times is UNC Charlotte's student-run news publication founded in 1947 and has received both state and national recognition.

We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students.

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UNC Charlotte events calendar

Thanksgiving Break
Nov. 26-30

Light Up The Lake
Dec. 2, 6:30 to 7:30 P.M.,
Hechenbleikner Lake

Late Night Breakfast
Dec. 2, 9-11 P.M.,
South Village Dining Hall (SoVi)

Reading Day
Dec. 3

Fall Commencement
Dec. 12 - 13

Winter Break
Dec. 10 - Jan. 12, 2026

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

An emergency issue

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief



A lot of planning goes into our print issues. Every summer, we map out dates, budgets and sometimes what we'll cover in each issue.

The 12 pages you hold in your hand weren't part of that plan. We didn't even have the budget for another full issue, which is why there are 12 pages rather than the usual 16.

On Wednesday last week, during one of our many meetings planning

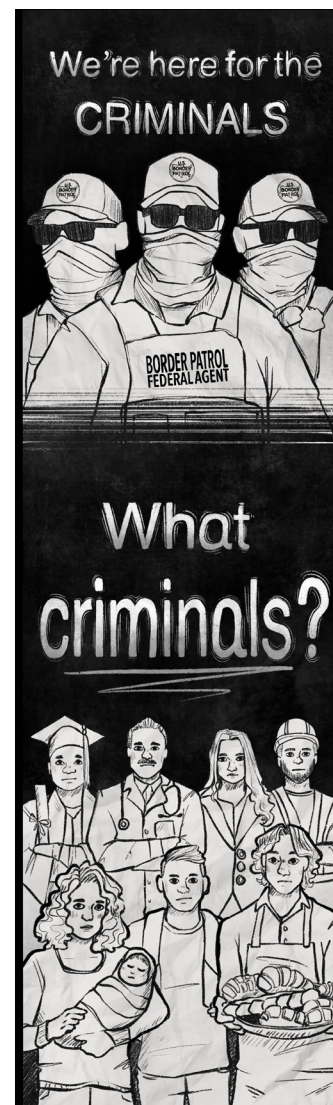
how best to cover a national story as a student newspaper, we made the decision to go to print again. Our recent basketball edition was supposed to be our last of the semester, and our layout staff was ready to sail off into the sunset.

But after hours of reporting and sleepless nights, it wasn't hard to recognize how important our work had become—to us and to our community. While our newsroom is increasingly digital, print remains

the most accessible way for students to find our work: 1,500 free copies at more than 30 locations across campus, every other week.

This issue came together quickly and has fewer pages than the 17 other editions you'll see this year. Still, it includes what we think is some of our strongest reporting on what may be the biggest story we cover all year.

We hope you find it's worth a read.



Tears, panic and empty stores: CBP presence rattles Charlotte business community

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

For the first time in 19 years that they could remember, Panaderia Odalys was turning away customers.

That morning, several workers, including the manager's 10-year-old son, had watched plain-clothed Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents working their way down the strip mall, knocking on windows and asking workers to step outside.

Panicked cries from her son filled the bakery as they locked up their shop, unsure what else to do. While not everyone in Odalys working was family, in the moment they were, as they came together to protect themselves.

According to the manager at Odalys who wished to remain anonymous, three CBP officers in uniform had been walking up and down the strip mall area, each armed with pistols and wearing vests, masks and sunglasses.

The manager at Odalys said that officers peered into the windows of their store, trying to get the others to come out of the panaderia, but they remained inside and went to the back of the

baking room.

Odalys workers said they watched in horror as customers got out of their cars, with plans to pick up their usuals and were detained in the parking lot by agents.

Following the arrests, several of the surrounding shops decided to close for the day, rattled by what they had witnessed.

"No quería que mi gente viviera con miedo. Pero no tengo palabras para describir lo que pasó. Mi hijo tiene sólo 10 años. Estuvo llorando durante una hora. Estamos a salvo pero asustados, dijo el gerente," the manager said.

("I didn't want my people to live in fear. But I don't have the words to describe what happened. My son is only 10 years old. He was crying for an hour. We are safe now, but scared.")

Shortly after the first arrests were made in the parking lot, a customer from Odalys left the store to try to escape the strip mall but was quickly detained by agents making their final sweep of the lot.

On a piece of cardboard, Odalys employees had written "cerrado" (closed) and taped it to a store window to ward off at-risk customers.

Some customers who approached the store were turned away by Odalys' manager, who apologized, shook her head and pointed to the sign.

"Me siento mal, pero creo que esto es lo mejor que puedo hacer ahora. Tengo demasiado miedo de dejar entrar a la gente," the manager said.

("I feel bad, but I think this is the best thing to do right now. I am afraid to let people in.")

Odalys turned away roughly 15 customers

in the 30 minutes that they spoke to the Niner Times.

After some time, Odalys pushed through nerves and began letting in customers with whom they were familiar. But after the two men she knew as regulars came and left, she decided to just be done for the day, as she did not want to keep opening the door to others she might not recognize and risk being tricked.

Across the parking lot from Odalys was "Los Antojitos" food truck, which stood empty—closed due to concerns about CBP.

Steps away, on the other side of a strip mall, a Hispanic-serving supermarket had found an alternative to turning customers away. At the supermarket's main entrance, two men stood manually opening the typically automatic sliding doors for customers in hopes of blocking any unwanted visitors.

While they knew it was not a perfect plan for safety, they wanted to ensure their customers and fellow community members could carry on with their day as normally as possible.

"Es una presencia incertidumbre de que puede pasar en el futuro de que estamos despuertos a bastantes cosas no importa si somos ciudadanos, residentes o si estamos en un proceso entonces esa es la incertidumbre porque no se sabe qué puede pasar en un futuro que estamos despuertos," an anonymous worker said.

("It is a presence of uncertainty about what can happen in the future, that we are exposed to many things, no matter if we are citizens, residents or if we are in a process, then that is the uncertainty because it is not known what can happen in the future when we are exposed.")

The concern wasn't confined to South Boulevard. Less than 20 minutes away on North Tryon Street, Martin, the manager of Compare Foods Supermarket, said he plans to protect his workers and customers as best he can.

"El número uno para toda la comunidad es no tener miedo. No te asustes porque hay mucha desinformación. Que pongan lo que quieran en las redes sociales, pero no hay que creerlo," Martin said.

("The number one [message] for the community is to not be scared. Don't be scared because there is a lot of misinformation. Let them put whatever they want on social networks; you don't have to believe them.")

Martin reported no CBP agent activity at his supermarket as of Saturday morning.

To protect its customers, Compare Foods is offering free grocery pickup and delivery through Dec. 31.

"Seguimos trabajando para ti, reforzando nuestro compromiso con la comunidad que ha confiado en nosotros por tantos años," a grocer said in a Saturday statement.

("We continue to work for you, strengthening our commitment to the community that has trusted us for so many years.")

In the University City area, several businesses had closed their doors over the weekend. Famous Toastery and Zapatas closed on Sunday, after receiving warnings that CBP agents were patrolling their parking lots.

Nearby, CPB was seen at the Boardwalk Plaza, located at J M Keynes Drive, at 10 a.m. on Sunday, detaining people from the apartment complex behind the shops.

At the Crafty Crab, only two tables were served over the entire day on Sunday, a drop for a restaurant that typically draws a large Hispanic crowd on Sunday afternoons, one worker at the Crafty Crab shared.

Restaurants, markets and bakeries have been left with empty tables as business has vanished over the weekend.

Amidst rumours of CBP staying late into November, CBS reports the agency is expected to depart the Charlotte area on Friday.

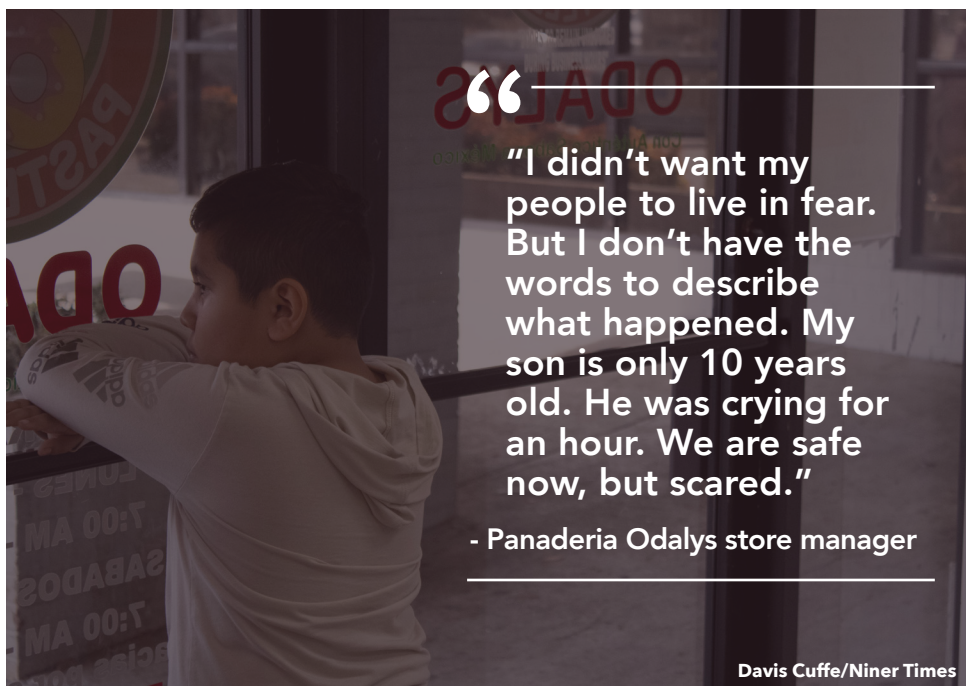
After over 130 people were detained over the weekend during CBP's "Charlotte Web" operation, North Carolina leaders and Charlotte officials are in the dark about its true duration.

"North Carolina, this is a stressful moment, but please stay peaceful, and if you see something wrong, record it and report it to local law enforcement. That's what we can do for our neighbors to keep each other safe. That's the North Carolina way," Governor Josh Stein said in a video statement.

At Odalys, the store manager said she hopes to welcome customers back as usual but remains cautious after the weekend's events. With so much unknown, she shared that they just need to take it day by day and hope their community can be restored rather than divided.

"Ni siquiera sé qué hacer en este momento," the manager said about reopening the store.

("I really don't even know what to do in this moment.")



Inside the mission to defend Charlotte's immigrants



Davis Cuffe/Niner Times

Simpson teaches volunteers how to respond to CBP.

Davis Cuffe | Editor-In-Chief

Under a setting sun that painted blue skies orange, Charlotte residents double-parked the gravel lot outside Amity Presbyterian Church to pack into the quiet building.

Grabbing blue vests and whistles on the way in, residents filled pews before standing alongside the building's inner walls and sitting in the aisle that divided the rows of seated attendees.

During the drive over to the church, maybe they'd seen a yellow sign on the corner of Albemarle and Amity Roads that read "fuck ICE" in big black letters. Or maybe they'd seen the group protesting in front of the Halal Cart on University City Boulevard, where Border Patrol had arrested a man the Sunday prior. Or even the Compare Foods parking lot, which was especially empty for a Tuesday night.

On Nov. 1, three days before the group filled the church, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) began its operation in Charlotte. In their first weekend, they'd arrested over 130, 44 of whom had criminal histories.

"I'm exhausted and I'm sure you all are exhausted too, and angry and heartbroken," Joel Simpson said. "We're going to organize all that we're feeling into this work to protect our communities and to care for our people."

Speaking to the crowd, which he said was over 500 deep at the organizing event, Simpson appeared comfortable leading the group. As a pastor by day, that isn't surprising. Under a grey coat, he wore black pants and clergy wear—and at some points during the night, almost preached.

"We want for the people doing this, for their hearts to be transformed," Simpson said during a lesson on how to interact with immigration enforcement officers.

"When we say, more good for more people, more peace for more people, more safety for more people, it's got to include them."

Simpson was joined at the front of the church by organizers from Siembra NC, an activist

group that works to defend immigrant and Latinx communities in the state.

Over the first four days of CBP's presence in Charlotte, the organization has been training volunteers and sending them out to watch for CBP and alert others to their presence.

The group was already in talks with Simpson and the United Methodist to train volunteers to respond to ICE when it was announced last Friday that CBP would operate in Charlotte.

Anahi Tapia Torres, an organizer with Siembra, said that her group has been preparing since the start of 2025 for the Trump administration's immigration crackdown to reach Charlotte. Still, it hasn't kept the last few days from wearing on her.

"I'm up at 6 a.m., but I'm getting enough rest," said Torres. "This is not at all the situation that our people should be going through right now, so while I'm tired, I'm ok."

Torres and Simpson worked together to lead the group through training on what to do while volunteering and how to de-escalate and record CBP arrests.

While teaching attendees proper protocol for responding to CBP arrests, Simpson welcomed 10 blue-vest-wearing volunteers to the front of the church to role-play an arrest and proper response for practice.

Vested volunteers were instructed to blow their whistles three times to alert others of immigration enforcement, ask for the name of the arrested individual and sing.

The instructions made for a bizarre scene as all 500 or so attendees rose from their seats to sing "This Little Light of Mine," while role players whistled at other volunteers who, as CBP agents, fake-arrested another attendee. One of the volunteers who helped the group learn the first two verses of "This Little Light of Mine" looked no older than 12.

Simpson and Siembra pointed to the Civil Rights Movement, when activists would use the

song to steady themselves and stimulate positivity, as the rationale for singing. Still, Simpson admits all of it—training civilians to combat one of the world's most well-funded law enforcement agencies with songs and whistles while maintaining his day job—is a little dystopian.

"I was in this like administrative nothing meeting and I was like, 'it feels like the world is ending, why are we here, you know?'" Simpson said.

Despite the odd nature of the trainings, organizers believe they're working. The Siembra has provided live, accurate updates on CBP's locations in Charlotte through the beginning of the operation and says their method has warded off agents mid-arrest before.

"By doing this and understanding it's more helpful to do what's being taught than getting in their face, it's gonna stay in the front of my mind," Daniel Thomas, an attendee at the event, said following its conclusion.

"I feel prepared, I feel ready."

Andrea Orozco, who attended because she was Latina and wanted to bring back the information from the meeting, translated into Spanish, said she wasn't able to feel much at all after the meeting.

"The past few days, and it's been absolutely heartbreaking, terrifying and at times it's been paralyzing," Orozco said. "I just feel numb."

Tuesday's session was only the second of six Siembra trainings planned for the week, but after Monday's training aired on MS NOW's "The Rachel Maddow Show," Torres may soon be hunting for a bigger space.

"North Carolina has shown that, whether you are an immigrant, white, Black or Asian, this is not the type of thing that we want to see. People don't want this in the country," Torres said regarding the training's growing popularity. "I think that the Trump administration is not listening to that."

Like Torres, Simpson has been trying to get

the Trump administration to listen for quite some time now.

Ahead of the passing of the "Big Beautiful Bill" spending policy, Simpson began attending "Moral Mondays," in which groups would travel to Washington, D.C., to pray in the rotunda of the nation's Capitol for a more moral budget. In May, Simpson and five other faith leaders were arrested and charged with crowding, obstructing and incommoding while praying in the Capitol.

While under an administration that has used Christianity to justify sharper immigration policy, Simpson's pro-immigrant messaging has remained rooted in faith.

"The passage people know a lot, is 'Love God and love your neighbor as yourself,'" Simpson said. "And in Leviticus, it says 'You shall love your immigrant neighbor as yourself and treat them as a citizen among you.'"

Torres's motivation stems from her family.

A daughter of immigrants, her first memory of participating was when her parents skipped work to protest in 2006's "Day Without an Immigrant," a day that opposed proposed legislation pushing for the criminalization of undocumented immigrants and increased border enforcement.

"That was super powerful for me to see how when people come out in numbers, they can actually make a difference," Torres said.

Nearly two decades after her parents skipped work to join thousands in protest, Torres has watched a version of the policy they once fought against become law. Now, instead of skipping work to protest, immigrants like her parents stay at home in fear of arrest.

And still Torres continues to spark the same drive that brought her into this work—gathering hundreds to try to make a difference.

As border patrol tightens its grip around Charlotte, Torres hopes that spark will be enough to light the fire she believes her community needs.



Rumors about CBP have spread across Charlotte: Here's what we know

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief
Davis Cuffe/Niner Times

As Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) presence in Charlotte continues through the workweek, rumors have emerged about the agency's actions and incidents involving CBP agents.

The following are some rumors the Niner Times has seen over the four days the agents have been present and the facts behind them.

Rumor: ICE agents are arresting patients in their beds at Atrium Health University City.

Facts: Officials who spoke to the Niner Times at the hospital say a man was injured during his arrest and is being held at the hospital to receive care. As of Sunday, Nov. 16, CBP agents were at the hospital to monitor and guard the man, but are not arresting anyone at the hospital.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have not been reported or seen in Charlotte, so information circulating regarding the legality of ICE operating in hospitals is irrelevant. CBP is a different agency from ICE and has different rules regarding legal operations in hospitals. As of Nov. 18, no verified report confirms either agency arresting patients at the Atrium hospital.

Rumor: CBP agents are in plainclothes and unmarked vehicles on UNC Charlotte's campus.

Facts: University officials stated they had not heard of any CBP agents on campus on Monday, when rumors of CBP agents on campus began.

On Sunday, the University informed the Niner Times that they had not heard of any planned CBP activity on UNC Charlotte's campus.

There are no verifiable reports of CBP agents on campus, only anonymous Yik Yak posts. The Niner Times reached out to accounts posting claims of CBP on campus and did not receive a response.

The Niner Times verified that a vehicle circulating on social media and assumed to belong to CBP did not belong to the agency.

Rumor: Willy Aceituno, the man, a Honduran-born U.S. citizen, who CBP attempted to arrest twice within 10 minutes, acted "erratic" and "refused lawful commands".

Facts: On Sunday, the Department of Homeland Security reposted the Charlotte Observer's coverage of Aceituno's arrest and claimed that during Aceituno's arrest, he "became erratic, re-

fused lawful commands and had to be removed from his vehicle" and "later admitted he was trying to distract officers so others could evade the law."

In an interview with the Charlotte Observer, Aceituno disputed the DHS's claims.

"That video is everywhere, and they're looking for a justification to shut people up," Aceituno told the Observer through a translator. "But if I were obstructing them in their work, they would have arrested me, and I would be in jail. They don't have a justifiable basis. Obstructing justice means arrest."

The video Aceituno describes refers to the video that went viral over the weekend of CBP officers breaking the driver's side window of Aceituno's truck and removing him through the window of the vehicle.

Aceituno told the Charlotte Observer he did not block agents as the DHS claims, attempt to help anyone he believed was a criminal or interfere with CBP operations in any physical way. He admitted he tried to stall agents while speaking with them, but questioned whether his actions could meaningfully disrupt their operation.

"I was talking to them, not restraining them," Aceituno said. "They're security officials of the

United States, the most powerful country in the world. I don't think a dummy like me could distract such capable people."

Rumor: All those arrested by CBP in Charlotte this week have criminal histories.

Facts: In a Monday DHS press release, the department stated that 44 of the 130 arrested in the first weekend of the operation have known criminal histories.

According to the DHS, the records of those arrested include aggravated assault, assault with a dangerous weapon, assault on a police officer, battery, driving under the influence and hit-and-run. The DHS claims that two arrested are known gang members.

The Trump administration has taken a "zero tolerance" stance against those who are present or enter the country without proper authorization and considers those who do so criminals.

Editorial: Standing against inhumane immigration enforcement

Niner Times Opinion Staff

Recent raids in Charlotte by United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers have struck fear throughout our community. This fear comes in many forms, as these raids and unlawful detentions have consequences far beyond the borders of Charlotte itself.

The opinion section of the Niner Times condemns the actions taken by the federal government due to the harm they are causing to our democracy, national identity, economy and the lives of people in this country.

When we think of America, what comes to mind for many is the amazing diversity that has shaped and built our country into the melting pot it is

today. Our country has come to embrace an array of beautiful cultures from societies all over the world.

The United States has long taken pride in being a mixed conglomeration of other cultures and identities, so why are we trying so hard to erase that part of our history? Lately, the country feels as though it is becoming a monolith instead of the melting pot we originally celebrated.

America once had open arms when welcoming immigrants and people in need. Look back to Ellis Island, once regarded as a gateway for immigrants in search of a new home. Why are we no longer open to people searching for sanctuary like we were in the past?

Is it because the people we are welcoming are no longer white or European? What ICE is doing now, attacking people searching for safety and sanctuary, within an increasingly inaccessible immigration system, is intensely un-American and goes against all of our previous values and history.

These abuses of executive power have direct consequences for everyday people: they erode the most basic constitutional protections. The president's use of ICE, as well as the National Guard, exploits a legal gray area surrounding his authority to indefinitely occupy American cities and states, paving the way for a military junta the likes of which America has never seen.

Historically, presidents have erred on the side of federal intervention; U.S. President George Washington argued to Henry Knox in a letter after Shay's Rebellion that if the government's authority were to be diminished, "anarchy and confusion must prevail."

From Washington to Richard Nixon, whose FBI had ramped up its COINTELPRO program to spy on anti-war and leftwing organizers, the executive branch has long abused the lack of specificity around the scope of the president's authority to use the Department of Defense (now the Department of War) to intervene at home as much as abroad.



Now, President Donald Trump is taking that abuse even further. Border Patrol agents are monitoring drivers and flagging “suspicious” travel patterns. The Supreme Court has preserved a path for ICE agents to profile individuals for arrest explicitly racially.

And while Congress trips and falls in its pathetic attempts to reclaim its power as the most powerful branch, the president exploits the legal gray zones he inhabits to turn our once citizen-armed units into a personal secret police force. These overreaches are not abstract; they translate into violations of basic human rights.

Although many Americans may not realize it, by virtue of being a person in the United States, everyone is ascribed certain human rights. Yes, citizens have special political rights, but non-citizens, documented or not, have rights just because they are human.

Arguably, the most ultimate of these rights is the right to due process, which includes the right to a speedy trial, tried by a court of your peers and heard by any court in general. Even those who have entered the United States illegally have this right under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.

In any case, being undocumented is not a criminal offense but a civil offense. This applies to people who entered the country legally but overstayed or violated their visa. People who entered the country illegally have still only committed misdemeanors, equivalent to petty theft.

Imagine if you shoplifted a lip gloss from Walgreens and were met with five to 10 armed men wearing ski masks who smashed the window of your car before yanking you out, face down, onto the pavement. Imagine being thrown in a cramped detention center, sleeping on cold concrete floors, bright lights blaring, and children wailing around you for days, only to be let go without apology because, as it turns out, you had paid for the lip gloss.

Heinous serial killers like Jeffrey Dahmer and Nazis who perpetrated the Holocaust got their day in court. Ted Bundy was even allowed to represent himself. But mothers, fathers, business owners and everyday residents are barred from or terrorized into missing court dates for fear of being arrested at the courthouse.

This should no longer be a partisan issue. When anyone is snatched by armed men who refuse to identify themselves or even glance at a person’s citizenship status before shoving them in a van, no one is safe.

If you are unsure how to feel about ICE and CBP actions, listen to perspectives from students directly impacted. Two Hispanic Charlotte students explained why resistance to these actions is necessary.

When speaking to an opinion staffer, they described the widespread fear among the Hispanic community because of these arbitrary raids. The majority of those being targeted are not criminals. They came here in search of a better life.

There are no warrants required by these agents to take the actions they do. They stop, search and abduct at their own discretion, going mostly off a racial profile. Along with this racism support-

ed by the government, they stated that they now encounter more anti-Hispanic sentiment in their day-to-day lives.

These students noted that they must not only worry about themselves; their entire family is always at risk. One student stated that they went back to their hometown just to take care of their siblings. This is a burden no student should have to carry.

UNC Charlotte is a community, and we must ease such burdens in any way possible. Spreading awareness and showing support go a long way. Think, if your family were under threat by the government, how would you feel?

Fear on the ground is made worse by widespread misinformation. Ignorance can be bliss. However, there is a difference between protecting your peace and choosing to be ignorant. With CBP coming to Charlotte this past week, we have seen a rise in misinformation as well as ignorance toward the issue. Misinformation deters people from understanding the actual harms occurring.

Misinformation leads to panic and confusion, resulting in people not knowing what to believe anymore. This can cause people to tune out warnings, as some have been proven false. People pay less attention if they cannot trust any sources.

But just because something is scary or may not affect you, does not mean you can just ignore it. This is our community; we are stronger when we care for all members of it. It’s selfish to ignore what is going on simply for your own comfort.

The current administration constantly reminds Americans of the nation’s economic dominance, with the president constantly stating that we are doing phenomenally well and that this is the ‘greatest economy we’ve ever had.’ That message feels diluted here in North Carolina, especially in Charlotte, where CBP raids and the fear they generate are hitting Hispanic businesses hard.

A recent Charlotte Business Journal article reported that dozens of local Latino-owned businesses have shut their doors. Neighbors have lost access to essential community services. Small business owners lose revenue, and employees go without paychecks. And all of this is happening because customers, workers and community members are terrified to leave their homes, regardless of immigration status.

Charlotte’s Latino community generates \$13 billion in economic activity each year. They are one of the region’s strongest drivers of prosperity and a key force behind the Queen City’s continued growth. About 15% of Charlotte’s nearly 900,000 residents are Latino, and there are 8,000 Latino-owned businesses in the area.

We want a thriving economy for all our residents. When our neighbors succeed, everyone benefits. We must let the people who drive the economy keep building it, without the fear of being targeted and harassed on their way to work, school or their favorite local cafe.

As we know, every inhabitant of this country is afforded rights under our Constitution. Less is said of the citizen’s duty to uphold the rights of their neighbor. No document enforces a civic responsibility to stand up for the liberties of those around you; it remains a personal choice. Whether you choose to watch as members of your community are beaten and taken to inhumane holding cells or protest and fight against the injustice is of no importance to the law.

With that being said, does it make us any less American under the ideals this nation was founded upon if we refuse to aid the countless individuals being threatened by tyranny?

Our country was built upon the national ethos of liberty and justice for all. As Charlotte is swarmed by Border Patrol, the residents of this city receive neither. Due process is ignored, with perfectly verifiable REAL ID cards dismissed as fake, with no justification.

Where is the justice in abducting any Latino you can find without regard to their legal status? Where is the liberty in arresting citizens who simply report the location of CBP operations to give forewarning to their neighbors?

The sad thing is that those who take part in the effort to thwart ICE are few and far between. These people, though, are truly standing up for the American ethos. When someone shows up to a protest, delivers groceries for a family too afraid to go outside, donates their time spreading resources to individuals at risk, those people embody the true American spirit. If we truly believe in the diverse, hopeful nation we claim to be, we must all assume that spirit.



Davis Cuffe/Niner Times

Emergency protest against U.S. Customs and Border Patrol draws over 400 protestors in uptown Charlotte

Giselle Jimenez Del-Carmen | Asst. News Editor

Over 400 protestors gathered at First Ward Park in Uptown Charlotte on Nov. 15, for an emergency protest against the ongoing U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) presence in Charlotte.

Protesters carried various flags and signs in both English and Spanish that conveyed similar messages against CBP.

Protestors then marched the streets of the city with various chants such as “No fear, no hate, immigrants are welcome here.”

‘It’s not a game anymore’: reactions to the protest

Alongside these chants, protestors shared their thoughts regarding the city’s ability to come together for an emergency protest against the CBP.

Katie, 19, along with her younger sister, had Mexican flags draped over their backs.

“The fact that all these people are showing up, white people, Black people, Hispanics, all types of Hispanics, that means something to me. So that makes me happy,” Katie said. “I know some people say, ‘if I don’t go, it’s not going to make a difference,’ I’m glad I didn’t miss out.”

Amid hundreds of protestors who spoke majority English, a Hispanic family of four stands: Vivian with her daughter, Natalie, who shared her thoughts in Spanish.

“We are here collaborating with the Hispanic community; it feels powerless wanting to do

something, but not being able to help people who are in the immigration process or who are being detained by ICE.”

Before entering Charlotte, CBP has made national headlines for its presence in California and Chicago, as viral social media videos show hundreds of arrests.

“When I saw it online, I was like, ‘Thank you God that it’s not here,’ but now that it’s here, we’ve got to start taking action about this. It’s not a game anymore,” Katie said.

In the park before the protest, two women in Mexican jerseys sat on the ledge, holding signs, waiting for the protest to begin.

One of them was Rosie Morales, a 25-year-old born in Charlotte.

“Seeing everything that’s been on the news recently, ICE and the Border Patrol coming into Charlotte, it’s not right. It’s separating families, and we need to speak up. Everyone who can speak up should speak up,” Morales said.

Alex Morris, who arrived with a “Fuck ICE” sign, is affiliated with a few Hispanic organizations in the city, such as Hola Charlotte.

“It comes to the power of the people to come together and to really help people in need because there are the people who help with every little thing that you don’t see, that invisible work, the hard work nobody wants to do,” Morris said.

Summer Lampi, a 20-year-old, was at home when a friend told her about the protest and asked if she would like to come along, to which Lampi responded, “Yes.”

“I hope that my presence and the other people here, too, can chase ICE out and keep the people here safe, because there’s a big Hispanic community, especially where I live,” Lampi said.

Close to home

Aside from express-

ing their thoughts about using their voices, protestors shared a wide range of reactions to CBP, especially regarding its presence in Charlotte.

“They’re coming to places that are liberal states or mostly democratic areas to be like ‘we’re trying to intimidate you, we’re trying to scare you’ but we will continue to push back and we know that people in Charlotte are going to stand up against what’s wrong,” Morris said.

Vivian expressed why and how the Hispanic community in Charlotte, including herself, is being affected.

“The fear people have of going out, of going to work, the fear of sending their children to school, especially people who are good workers and have no criminal record, they assume they’re coming to look for criminals; we are not criminals, we are hardworking people,” Vivian said.

Vivian also expressed concern about the well-being of not only her children but also those nationwide.

“They [the children] wonder why this is happening, because my parents are looking for them; it affects them mentally, it affects them quite a bit psychologically.”

Natalie, Vivian’s daughter, spoke on the perspective of being a daughter of immigrants.

“It’s a worry day and night if they’re gonna be here tomorrow or the next day or if they’re gonna see them again,” Natalie said.

Lampi, another Charlotte native, expressed her reaction to the city being a new location for the immigration crackdown.

“I am very shocked because I’ve been here all my life, and Charlotte hasn’t always been a big city, so I wouldn’t expect them to target the city,” Lampi said.

The national immigration crackdown

Protestors also expressed their thoughts on the ongoing national immigration crackdown by the Trump administration.

“We’re not okay with the way ICE is acting around immigration without due process, just taking people off the streets. The majority of people who came here to America, are coming here

for refuge and for the American dream,” Morris said.

Katie said that she thinks racial profiling is playing a significant role in the operations nationwide.

“Trump is a racist. The fact that he’s targeting people for their looks—I know he said he wanted people out for the fact that we’re illegals and we bring drugs here, but for the most part, I don’t even think he’s targeting those exact people,” Katie said.

Bryan Murillo, 32, and son of immigrants, was born in Los Angeles before moving to Charlotte for work. He came straight from work to be at the Saturday protest.

“We’re just people, everybody represents a different flag, but at the end of the day, we’re all human beings, and we all just come here to work. We’re not criminals and we don’t hate America, on the contrary, we love America,” Murillo said.

“It’s just hardworking people who come here to work. They mean no harm and are a support for their families back home. If they’re border patrol, what are you doing inside of America? They should be protecting the borders.”

The march in Uptown

The march circled the city before returning to the park, with police officers clearing the way.

They returned, with Asha Patel, community organizer with the Party for Socialism and Liberation, who ended the march with a final message.

“It’s exactly what I expected from Charlotte. I knew people would come out. We knew that the energy would be here. We knew that they would stand in solidarity with our immigrant community and our immigrant neighbors,” Patel said.



Davis Cuffe/Niner Times

License plate mix-up leaves student fearing ICE pursuit, raising questions about campus response

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

All Alex wanted to do was to go home. After leaving a sorority event Sunday, the second-year UNC Charlotte student pulled out of East Deck and stopped at the light near the Circle K on University Boulevard, when her heart dropped.

Sitting directly behind her, she said, was a white Ford van marked with a green Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) logo.

Trying not to draw attention, Alex checked her rearview mirror and saw two men inside wearing vests and face coverings pulled up to their noses, details she recognized from warnings about identifying potential ICE agents.

When the light turned green, she started toward I-85. But as she drove from Exit 43 to 36, she realized the van stayed on her tail.

Panic set in. Alex couldn't safely go home, knowing her parents were undocumented, and she braced herself for what she feared might happen next.

"My biggest concern was how I was going to proceed," she said. "I couldn't just go home that night, and I honestly was just preparing myself for the worst."

While explaining the situation to her parents over the phone, Alex sped through lanes trying to get back to campus. She and her friend Amelia agreed to meet at the Popp-Martin Student Union, and Amelia immediately called the emergency hotline provided by the University.

But the call didn't go as she expected. "The call experience was poor," Amelia recalled. "Because I was calling on behalf of my friend, I felt as though she didn't believe me, and I wasn't being taken seriously. I kept repeating myself while she asked skeptical questions. I understand needing information, but it didn't feel like it was coming from a place of wanting to help."

Although Alex and Amelia requested that campus police meet them at the Union Deck, the dispatcher insisted they go straight to the police station.

The two stuck to their original plan and met at the Union Deck. According to Amelia, before they could leave for the station, the dispatcher called Alex directly, asked several quick questions, and ended the call by saying, "If you don't file a report or come to the

station, this was all just a waste of time."

Minutes later, two campus police cars arrived at the Union Deck. Officers reminded Alex that because the incident occurred off campus, their jurisdiction was limited and they had no communication with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) or ICE.

However, through their conversation with campus police, Alex learned why she may have been followed: a license plate-scanning system.

Officers showed her that a deportation order was attached to a person who shared her last name and date of birth. But the individual listed wasn't Alex.

Alex said she then provided proof of her citizenship, and officers explained that whoever had followed her had likely seen the deportation alert triggered by her license plate.

"The whole time, my family was just so scared," Alex said. "And now they're even more scared knowing cars can be flagged by their plates."

A Nov. 16 incident report in the campus police logs stated that a student had called about her friend being followed by a suspicious truck and that officers met with the student involved.

"I'm glad we called and used the resource. It was disappointing, but in the end, the

result we needed was met," Amelia said despite the stressful process.

When contacted by the Niner Times, the University said there was no record of a call to the emergency hotline reporting that a Border Patrol agent was following a student.

"All of our campus police lines are recorded. We have no record of any call coming into 704-687-8300 indicating that someone was being actively followed by a Border Patrol agent on campus. However, we take these concerns seriously. We encourage this student to contact Chris Gonyar, AVC [associate vice chancellor] for Safety and Security, directly so that we may investigate further," the University said.

Amelia later provided Niner Times with proof of her call to the hotline number, along with two additional calls to the department's extension.

The following day, Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber released a statement to the University regarding CBP's presence in Charlotte.

Since the incident, Alex has not gone to campus for any classes or activities, and she

shared that while she was glad that Gaber acknowledged what was going on, the statement felt broad.

"To me, it just really goes to show that campus likes to say that they care, but they really have nothing to show for us. This broader statement shows that they really aren't gonna stick their heads out for us. And the statement they gave was to just get us off their back," Alex said.

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Davis Cuffe/Niner Times

Operation ends, fallout remains: Charlotte reckons with 370 Border Patrol arrests

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

There was a certain tension on Charlotte streets the week of Border Patrol's operation.

Every van could hold federal agents, poised to arrest a co-worker, a friend, a family member, or, to some, an illegal immigrant.

Parking lots became the sites of arrests, as agents patrolled, approaching individuals to ask for papers and pulling others out of their cars.

Businesses closed, their customers hiding at home, shades drawn, nervous at every knock.

Desks sat unfilled in classrooms across the city as schools reported mass absences.

It's not something you expect. Agents had operated in Los Angeles and Chicago before—far-away cities with huge populations and national visibility. But Charlotte? Here?

And yet after five days of Border Patrol operating, 370 have been arrested. What will happen to the 370 is unclear. Most will likely be deported.

The agency departed Charlotte on Thursday, according to the Mecklenburg County sheriff. A statement from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) disputed the sheriff's claim, but as of Nov. 23, there have been no reported Border Patrol arrests since Thursday.

At the operation's end

The night after the agency's departure, Charlotte's immigrant community gathered en masse in east Charlotte and, for the first time all week, took a breath.

At times, the scene outside of Manolo's Bakery on Nov. 21 looked more like a block party than a protest, though it was labeled as the latter.

Attendees rallied for hours to music, supportive honks from passing cars and the

occasional spirited speech. At one point, fireworks went off as the group marched down Central Avenue.

Many held signs that'd likely been used before in one of the week's prior protests.

Those signs and voices alike reflected the hurt the Border Patrol operation left behind.

Eric Loreda, a veteran of the Marine Corps and son of immigrants, called the operation "unjust."

"I have never seen anything so unjust in my 30 years living here as I have seen in this past week. 'Right now, we are labeled as killers, murderers, rapists, drug dealers and criminals,' Loreda said. 'We are part of this community, and if you look around right now, we are here.'"

Throughout the operation, the DHS described itself as "targeting the worst of the worst." Everyone DHS identified in its press releases on the arrests is Hispanic or Latino. The DHS wrote that 44 of the first 130 arrested had criminal histories; it's unclear how many of the 370 total also had histories.

"Trauma"

"There's going to be social, emotional and economic trauma to our children, to families and our small businesses," Charlotte Councilmember-elect Juan Diego Mazuera Arias said regarding the lasting effects of the operation.

Elected in November as Charlotte's first Latino councilmember, Mazuera Arias has not yet taken office but has been at the forefront of Charlotte's pushback against Border Patrol. On Friday night, he gave a speech calling on attendees to ask their elected officials to do the same.

He said he was encouraged by what he saw outside Manolo's.

"This is what recovery looks like," Mazuera Arias said. "In times of fear and despair, we will always look to joy and laughter and love to get out of dark times."

Outside of Manolo's, handing out food to a long line of customers outside his shiny red food truck was Manuel Gaucin. Gaucin

said his food truck business, Hurachon De Durango, had seen a 70% drop in revenue the week of Border Patrol's operation. Still, he gave out free food in hopes of attracting new customers.

"We support our people, we support our friends," Gaucin said. "The people, they just want to work, they don't want to be bothered."

Standing above Gaucin's truck outside was a billboard that read "Manolo's you love them," in bold black letters.

The billboard's message has proven true this week. Like many other immigrant-owned businesses, Manolo's closed on the first day of Border Patrol's operation out of safety concerns for his customers.

While it was a week without revenue, there's no doubt that Manolo's will have some new customers following the operation. His parking lot served as a meeting point for protests and impromptu press conferences.

Friday night may have been Manolo's biggest crowd all week, as hundreds stretched down the block. Standing in the thick of the crowd was King Techillo, who handed bottles of water to attendees. All week, Techillo delivered essential items and groceries to those who were too scared to leave their homes.

"Just seeing them be in the house with all the windows down, everything covered up, it's really sad," Techillo said.

Techillo wasn't the only one helping this week. Across Charlotte, grocery stores offered free delivery to residents. Just across the block from Techillo stood Jorge Casales, who said he'd helped deliver to people in other cities during immigration enforcement operations and done so in Charlotte this week. On Friday, he collected donations at a white folding table to send to residents in New Orleans, the next target of an immigration crackdown.

"We've been supporting Chicago, we've been supporting LA," Casales said. "Every single time that we do this, we get better and better at it."

Reckoning as they endured

Watching hundreds rally outside of Manolo's and thinking back to past protests in Los Angeles and Chicago that'd clashed with law enforcement, Casales had hope.

"There's been five days, not a single police incident or injury. It gives me goosebumps to see everybody celebrating," Casales said. "There are flags from all over the world out here, not just America's. That's what it should be."

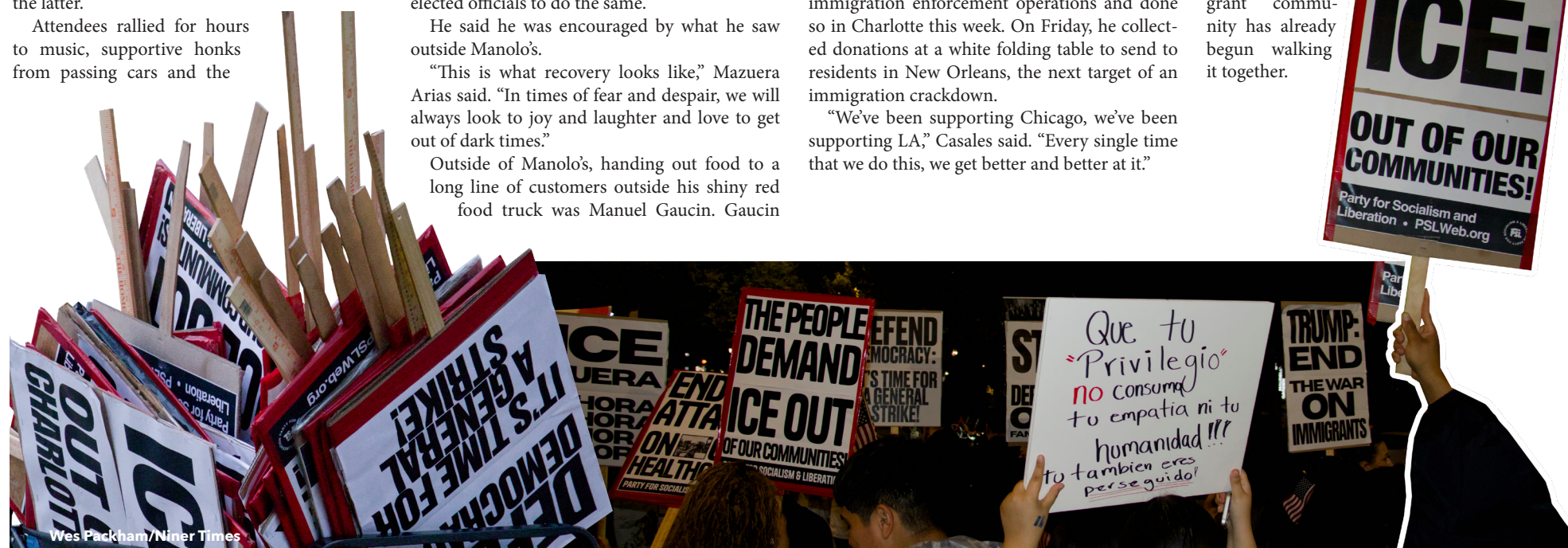
Soon, people will open their blinds, unlock their doors and go back to work. Businesses will reopen, and their customers will return. Attendance rates will return to normal in schools. But some changes are more permanent than others.

"There's never really coming back when someone's taken from your life, they're not dead, but they're gone," protest attendee Jonathan Miller said. "It takes a lot of effort to recover from such a tragedy. I don't believe there's ever coming back the same."

Border Patrol arrested 370 in their time in Charlotte. The agency has labeled those 370 as "the worst of the worst," and still, many are the family and friends of Charlotte residents.

Like Miller said, there's no easy way to recover from someone being pulled from your life. The hurt doesn't vanish when the vans leave, and the fear doesn't evaporate overnight.

The crowd at Manolo's didn't erase the week's feelings, but presented a community choosing to meet the aftermath with one another. The way forward remains uncertain, but Charlotte's immigrant community has already begun walking it together.



‘Six days’: How one Charlotte student is overcoming the fear CBP brought

Madeline Andrews | Arts & Culture Editor

Saturday was supposed to be a self-care day. G is a fourth-year student, graduating from UNC Charlotte in less than three weeks. That morning, she took her longboard to East Deck, taking fast curves in the empty lot. She planned to head to the greenway and keep skating—until she opened her Instagram.

On Saturday, Nov. 15, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) made the first arrests in what became a six-day operation, with arrest totals reaching over 350 according to the agency.

In the first hours of the operation, social media sites like Instagram and Snapchat became overrun with videos of the masked, heavily armed officers interrogating people on the street, seemingly at random.

“The first thing I did was start checking my parents’ locations,” G said.

Her father is a construction worker, and her mother works on an assembly line in a factory. Both from rural Oaxaca, Mexico, they struggled to find consistent work in their early teens, crossing into the U.S. in hopes of better pay. They considered filing paperwork until a close family member was deported at an immigration hearing, sending them back into hiding.

On Thursday, Nov. 20, G sat down with me to reflect on what life had been like for the past week.

Because of her parents’ legal status, CBP’s arrival in Charlotte brought back lifelong fear and anxiety. Instead of the greenway, she took her longboard to First Ward, where 400 people gathered for the first of many protests against the operation.

“I had this tangled mess of yarn in my head, I didn’t know what to make of what was happening,” G explained. At the protest, she saw a priest walking among the crowd, and thought of her parents’ Catholic faith.

“That’s when you start pleading to the universe. Pleading to God,” G said.

Later that night, she drove over an hour to her hometown to deliver groceries to her parents to limit their need to leave the house. Her parents were scared, but not surprised.

For dinner, her mother made pollo en adobo with rice and beans.

“The food hit differently that day. I was like, damn, is this the last meal my mother is going to make me?” G said.

On Monday, while preparing for a final presentation, she got a call from her aunt, who was panicked, claiming an ICE truck was spotted in their predominantly Hispanic neighborhood.

“I was stressed out of my mind, I just couldn’t

think. I apologized to my groupmates and booked it back home,” G said.

The unmarked van turned out to just be an unmarked van—not ICE or CBP, yet the panic had set in, bikes and sidewalk chalk were left abandoned in the street.

The first thing her mother asked when she came to the door was if she knew where the gold was.

“She took me to her room. She’s like, ‘Okay, this is where the rings are. This is where the chain’s at.’ You know, like family heirlooms,” G explained. “And then the folder of all the documentation we have, because me and my brother have dual citizenship.”

G was eight years old the first time her mother made sure she knew where the valuables were. They have gone over this action plan every year since.

“I think that’s when starting to grow up begins. You realize they are powerless. As a parent, they want to protect their children, but they aren’t even protected,” she said. “So there’s a sense of helplessness you carry with you for your entire life.”

She decided to go to Walmart to get her mother some flowers, which she tries to replace weekly, as well as two AirTags, one for each parent.

“I was looking at my mom’s shoes and thought I could probably cut a slit in the bottom and slip the tag in,” G said. “Because I knew that some people get taken and they don’t know where they are for days, my mom needs her medicine, she can’t go without it, she could have a stroke.”

Luckily, her fears were not realized.

Mecklenburg County Sheriff Garry McFadden announced on Thursday morning that CBP was leaving the city, only a few hours before G and I sat down for this conversation. Her parents remained safe an hour outside of Charlotte for the entire week-long operation, but she says this isn’t the end.

“I think this helped people realize how genuinely fucked up this is,” G said, “I don’t know about the future, but right now you’re picking what side of history you want to be on.”

G is trying to refocus and get excited to graduate in December—the first person in her entire extended family to even attempt a college degree.

When thinking of the trauma of the last week, she fears it is just a reality of her identity.

“Immigrants are already living in low poverty, and bills gotta be paid,” G

said. “They aren’t going to make time to grieve.”

Across the city, immigrant-owned businesses suffered greatly. According to The Assembly, 44% had been closed for more than three days, leading to thousands of dollars of profit loss.

It is unclear what the long-term effects of the current immigration policies will be. Time will tell how Charlotte will recover, and CBP is said to be heading to more cities around the country, continuing to unravel communities in their wake.

Outside of graduation and family, G copes primarily through her art. Her work is bold, colorful and often with large shapes and figures against an eclectic backdrop of textures and colors.

“I want to say I come off as more punk-ish, like I only wear black, but my art is always very colorful, I am a ‘kiss the rainbow’ type of person,” she said.

Growing up, her parents struggled to accept her alternative appearance; the black and the septum rings felt antithetical to her Catholic upbringing.

“They were strict because they’re trying to protect me, you see that a lot in my community, they don’t believe in themselves.”

Out of her graduating class, G was one of the few Hispanic students to leave their hometown. Art has been the main way she has unlearned the restrictions imposed during childhood.

Most recently, she’s been compiling a collection of drawings and essays for her younger brother, hoping to combat fear with creativity.

“It’s rooted in my culture to not speak about things, to just roll with the punches,” G said. “I think that’s why, as a kid, I didn’t have anyone to talk to, so I would just doodle a lot.”

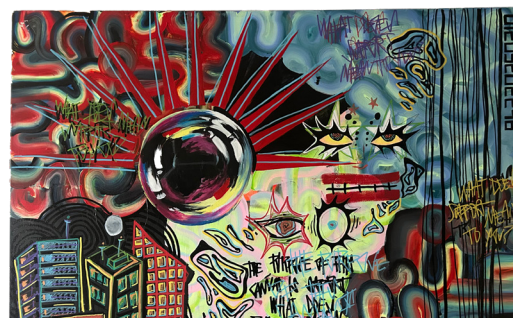
G wants people to reach out and ask questions to members of the community

who have been discriminated against, in hopes that open conversations can help process some of the trauma.

“People will never fully understand, but just listening is a big thing because people already feel like they don’t have a voice,” G said. “So try to dig in a little deeper, because you end up learning their story.”

“People will never fully understand, but just listening is a big thing because people already feel like they don’t have a voice ... So try to dig in a little deeper, because you end up learning their story.”

- G , fourth year



Caption: As her family lived in fear of Customs and Border Patrol raids during operation “Charlotte Web,” G coped primarily through her artwork, which she described as colorful and “kiss the rainbow.”



Demonstrators pack east Charlotte, and protest after Border Patrol's departure

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

Davis Cuffe & Giselle Jimenez Del-Carmen/Niner Times

