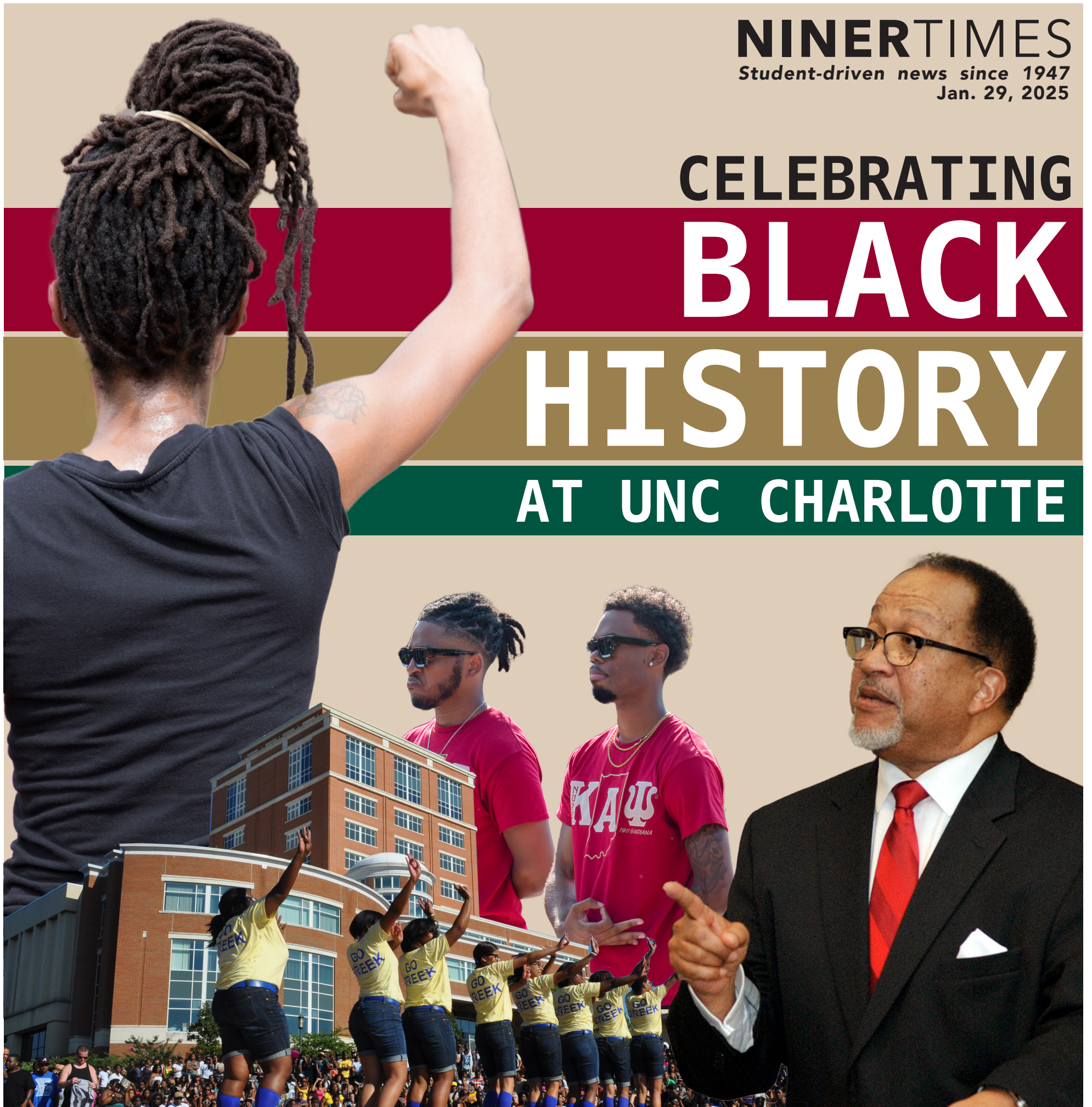


NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947
Jan. 29, 2025

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY AT UNC CHARLOTTE



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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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Events by Black and African Student Orgs

**The Black Organization Alliance
Board IG Story Takeover**
Feb. 3, 12-2 P.M., Popp-Martin
Student Union Porch

**Building Black Students: The Pep
Rally**
Jan. 31, 7-10:30 P.M., Cone
University Center After Hours

**The Playboy of the Western
World**
Feb. 13-16, Robinson Hall Black
Box Theater

**Organization of African Students
African Night 2025**
Feb. 22, 7-9:30 P.M., Popp-
Martin Student Union

**Black History Month Kickoff
Party**
Feb. 7, 7-11 P.M., Popp-Martin
Student Union

Black Student Union: Hairstory
Feb. 12, 6:30-8:30 P.M., Cone
University Center

**49ers Men's Basketball vs East
Carolina University**
Feb. 15, 4 P.M., Halton Arena

**Unity In Diversity's Food for the
Soul: Black History Celebration**
Feb. 25, 6-7 P.M., Cone
University Center

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

Your Black is beautiful

Kendall Maye | Arts & Culture Editor



As a person of color, it is easy to feel left out, especially when you look different than everyone around you. American beauty standards do not make it any easier.

Watching movies and reading magazines filled with people who do not look like you can make you feel even more self-conscious. Constantly being one of the only minorities in majority-white spaces can also contribute to loneliness.

There have been times when I have

wondered, "Why not me? Why is my skin color not good enough? Why not my facial features?" I am sure that many of you have also asked the same questions, constantly comparing yourself to an unattainable mold you wish to fit into.

While I cannot say that I have perfected the art of having unlimited self-confidence, I can say that I am learning how to embrace myself. It all starts with saying a simple phrase: "Black is beautiful."

Words of affirmation are a big part of

loving who you are and how you look. If you would not talk to a friend in such a negative way, why would you do it to yourself? Especially since society has historically made it difficult for Black people to love their natural features, we must learn to empower ourselves and others who look like us.

So, if you are ever feeling like you're not good enough, just remember this: Your features are shaped how they should be. Your skin is perfectly melanated. Your Black is beautiful.



Courtesy of Ivory Galloway/Building Black Students

UNC Charlotte's Building Black Students creates support and community for Black students

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

Among the over 400 student organizations at UNC Charlotte, Building Black Students (BBS) has emerged as a shining gem in the Charlotte community.

Founded in September 2022 first as Building Black Men, the organization rebranded in April 2023 to expand and cater to all of Charlotte's Black students.

With UNC Charlotte being a predominantly white institution, BBS aims to inspire and build community by providing a safe space and support for Black students.

During BBS meetings, the organization engages in structured conversations to educate and further discussions on topics relevant to the Black community. The group does not stray away from difficult topics; alcoholism and mental health have both been topics of discussion during the group meetings.

While these conversations can be difficult, building a space where members are comfortable asking whatever questions they may have and getting them answered is a key foundation of the organization.

In this sense of safety in free expression, third-year founder and president of BBS, Edward Hines, hopes to encourage members to build a sense of self in engaging with the organization.

"It's important to ensure we can lean on each other by always providing space for everyone to be their unique selves and to shine their light," said Hines. "Through our programming, we push this initiative by making ways for people to

express themselves, whether it be through question and answer or simply popping a balloon. We want to create a space where everyone can be who they are, beyond the mask."

Along with providing for Black students at Charlotte, the organization engages in community outreach. Through the organization's mentorship program, members of BBS visit Julius L. Chambers High School every Tuesday and Wednesday and engage with local high schoolers to prepare them for college and build community outside of the confines of UNC Charlotte.

"Our sense of building community isn't just inside our organization, but it's also outside of our school, outside of our campus, outside of our four walls," said Hines. "With the understanding that those high school students, and even the freshman class, that's our future, even though there's not much of the age gap or age difference, that's our future."

This mentorship program has helped not only with building community but has built BBS' numbers as well; the organization, which runs just over 125 members strong and has a large population of underclassmen, creates a long-lasting foundation for the future.

With this future in mind, Hines hopes the next generation of BBS members expand the mentorship program and visit more schools and even some universities to further BBS' positive reach.

As BBS continually expands, the club president role can be demanding for Hines, who is taking on a full courseload, is part-time employed and has other campus involvement. Still, while the role can be sometimes unrewarding, Hines knows it is not about him but BBS' impact.

"What keeps me engaged is knowing that it's not about me. The members come in, and they tell us about how inspired they are or how BBS has impacted them—even the E-Board," said Hines. "BBS has hosted some of the greatest people on this side of heaven, and I won't ever take that for granted."

With Hines' time as BBS' president coming to a close in the future, the organization's founding member hopes to find someone who finds similar joy in every part of the role as he does.

"The future BBS president—I have actually thought of this for a while—and I just want it to be someone who is just as inspired as me to change the climate of our culture," said Hines. "They can get happy about being approved for the perfect room to hold an event in. They get excited when events go well and just want the best for everyone, truthfully."

As Hines' legacy will be everlasting, so will BBS.

Through their mentorship programs and everyday work with 'Motivational Mondays,' weekly tabling, adopt-a-spot cleanups and other campus engagement, BBS has cultivated a community and support system that Hines believes is essential to the Black population at UNC Charlotte.

"It's important that BBS exists because our community needs a home," said Hines. "The world around us is changing rapidly, and our Black communities need to know that they are supported and that someone hears them. They need us."

A core value of BBS is its inclusivity, and while the organization's purpose is to support Black students, Hines strives for BBS to be anything but uninviting.

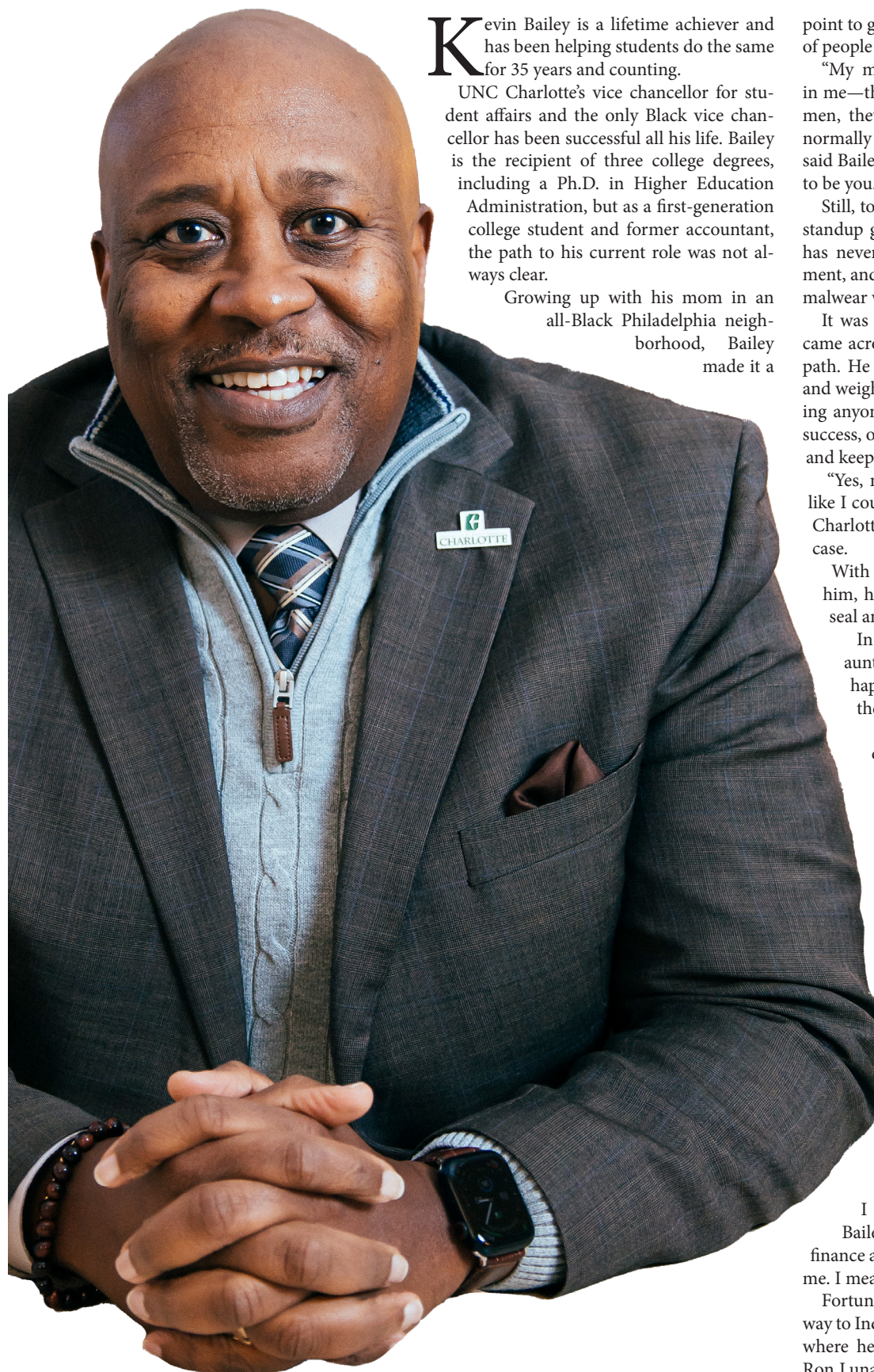
"BBS is for everyone. We are not a Black organization; we just support our Black students," said Hines. "If you support our Black students, then BBS will be a space for you as well."



UNC Charlotte's steady hand: How Kevin Bailey acts as Charlotte's consistent champion of student success

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

Ivory Galloway /Niner Times



Kevin Bailey is a lifetime achiever and has been helping students do the same for 35 years and counting.

UNC Charlotte's vice chancellor for student affairs and the only Black vice chancellor has been successful all his life. Bailey is the recipient of three college degrees, including a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration, but as a first-generation college student and former accountant, the path to his current role was not always clear.

Growing up with his mom in an all-Black Philadelphia neighborhood, Bailey made it a

point to go against the stereotypes he saw on TV of people who looked like him.

"My mom and grandmother really instilled in me—the images that you saw on TV of Black men, they weren't usually the hero; they were normally the thief, the culprit or the wrongdoer," said Bailey. "And so it was like, 'that doesn't have to be you.'"

Still, to this day, Bailey holds this attitude as a standup guy. He says he has never done drugs, has never had any problem with law enforcement, and is typically seen in freshly pressed formalwear when at work.

It was not until his 2008 divorce that Bailey came across the first bump in his golden paved path. He said it "wrecked" his sense of success and weighed heavily on him. Bailey avoided telling anyone out of fear of shattering his aura of success, opting to keep wearing his wedding ring and keep the secret.

"Yes, marriage is a two-way street, but I felt like I could not keep us together," said Bailey at Charlotte's 2019 Honor's College Failure Showcase.

With the secret of his divorce looming over him, he went to his aunt to finally break the seal and tell her the news.

In the short conversation, Bailey said his aunt only said "okay" after asking if he was happy with the decision and doing it for the right reason.

That upright mentality that made his divorce so scary led him to straight A's in his predominantly white classes and being what he called the "goody two-shoes kid" in his adolescence.

As someone with extra technological expertise, teachers went to Bailey for help, pulling him out of class to help with a projector or other piece of equipment.

After a near-flawless run of academic success from K-12, Bailey was met with the daunting challenge of applying for college. As a first-generation student with little help outside of a guidance counselor, Bailey found himself nearly lost in making the jump from high school to college.

"I didn't know jack, and I remember when it came to financial aid, I had to do a lot of the leg work," said Bailey. "My mom had to do her part with finance and that sort of stuff, but it was really all me. I mean, I had zero help."

Fortunately, Bailey was able to navigate his way to Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), where he found mentors in a student advisor, Ron Lunardini and John Welty, the school's vice

president for student affairs. After four years, Bailey graduated with a bachelor's in Science in Management Information Systems with a minor in accounting.

Unsure of what he wanted to do in his career path, Bailey said he picked the major to become an accountant after a friend told him he could make good money.

After a short and presumably profitable stint in accounting, Bailey decided to return to IUP looking for a change of scenery and an entrance to work in higher education. This return came as no surprise to Lunardini, who remarked to Bailey, "I knew you'd be back" upon his arrival.

"I don't like to be that predictable. But, I mean, he was right. I mean, this [working in higher education] is where I belong," said Bailey. "I can't imagine being in any other place."

After starting his career at Charlotte as a residence coordinator in 1990, Bailey stopped at Bowling Green University, Millersville and Tulane Universities and the University of West Florida before returning to Charlotte in 2017.

In his time as vice and associate vice president for student affairs at West Florida and Tulane, Bailey saw his fair share of what he called "large-scale 'capital c' crises."

At Tulane, Bailey helped oversee campus recovery after Hurricane Katrina, and at West Florida, Bailey aided in campus response after two nooses were found on campus. Then, two years after Bailey arrived in Charlotte, the campus saw the tragic 2019 school shooting that killed two and injured five.

"My friends joke like they don't want to work anywhere I am because crises follow me," said Bailey.

“They need to be told what to do, what’s going on, and most importantly, be imbued with a sense of hope that this too shall pass and we will be better, strong [and] faster because of this crisis.”

- Kevin Bailey, vice chancellor of student affairs

As a leader on campus among his staff and the student population, Bailey aims to lead and inspire the campus when guiding them through crises.

“They need to be told what to do, what’s going on and most importantly, be imbued with a sense of hope that this too shall pass and we will be better, stronger [and] faster because of this crisis,” said Bailey.

Through his work as Charlotte’s ‘fireman,’ cooling crises and dedication to student affairs, Bailey has become a comforting figure to the student body. Bailey is frequently pictured on Charlotte’s social media promoting campus events as a positive figure or engaging with students as someone students know they can talk to.

Despite the intimidating title of vice chancellor, Bailey has managed to connect with students in ways many cannot.

Even with his calming demeanor and friendly smile, earning this connection is no simple feat. Bailey looks for connection in everything, even cereal. At the yearly Halloween “Serial Bar” event hosted by the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, Bailey found an easy connection over the breakfast treat by eating cereal with milk separately.

“Breakfast cereal for students, there’s always a story,” said Bailey. “You have a favorite cereal or you don’t, and there’s a story. So I eat cereal like popcorn and milk like a chaser. And then students will have a reaction; they’ll think I’m crazy, or they’ll have some reaction and then their conversation goes.”

For Bailey, every interaction counts, even the ones about cereal.

One student, among the many that Bailey has worked with, Charlotte’s former student body president, Tife Olusesi, validated Bailey’s intention to take care in every interaction.

A speaker at Olusesi’s first-year orientation, Bailey said Olusesi told him he had been positively motivated by what Bailey said, and it had stuck with him four years after Bailey’s speech.

Before graduating, students like Olusesi fill out surveys asking which Charlotte faculty made a special impact on their time at the school. Faculty listed in these surveys receive cards letting them know these students had thought of them.

Naturally, Bailey’s office is home to these cards as his prized possessions.

“[The cards are] a reminder to me that someone’s always watching, and you never know when something you say will be impactful,” said Bailey.

Moment by moment, Bailey hopes to further establish himself as someone students can come to and have some rapport with before approaching. Even when students are upset with Bailey or bring to him a problem he cannot fix, he will never avoid the interaction.

“They’re pissed. But I owe it to them,” said Bailey. “I’m not going to duck them because it’s a hard conversation. I want to be honest.”

As a Black man who often is or has been affected by issues students bring up to him, maintaining the level of neutrality his role requires is not always easy.

This difficulty nearly peaked when students

came to Bailey about the removal of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programming at UNC Charlotte as a result of the UNC System Board of Governors policy passed in spring of 2024.

“I think issues of race, this whole DEI thing, it’s hard,” said Bailey. “Because, as you know, the only vice-chancellor of color, and the one who works with the students, the students might look to me like, ‘dude, you’re one of us, [you should be] helping out,’ and those are the hardest conversations to have.”

When these conversations get difficult, like they did with DEI, Bailey said he will always aim to be honest in his explanation and support students through positive future actions.

As a professional in crisis management with his own perspective as a first-generation student and deep connections to the student body, knowing what the next steps should be is almost second nature.

In response to Bailey’s most recent crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the vice chancellor advocated for students without proper resources in the brand-new online learning environment by ensuring that any student needing a computer

could get one.

While his perspective as a Black man aids him in his work, Bailey is still subject to the systemic racism and biases that all Black people face.

Even with his flawless record and the friendly demeanor that UNC Charlotte has come to love, some only see Bailey as the stereotype he has avoided since he was a boy in Philadelphia.

Bailey said he would have no issue while shopping in his formal workwear, but in casual clothes or jewelry, he would be watched as if he were about to commit a crime.

“I’m being watched, and I know I’m being watched as if I’m about to steal something from the store,” said Bailey. “Just because I am well educated, just because I’ve got a really nice job and a fancy title, just because at work, I wear suits, the general person out the street on a Saturday afternoon knows none of that about me. They just see the face. It’s part of life for me as a Black male. I see it all the time, and it’s sometimes draining, but it’s unfortunately the life that comes with this

particular skin.”

Despite the frequent unfair judgment from those around him, Bailey is a success story and a role model to students on campus, which is something he is very aware of.

“I really think about race and my privilege being a vice-chancellor,” said Bailey. “What I get to do with and for all students—I take that responsibility very seriously. I am always conscious of who’s watching. So, what I say, how I say it, how I’m dressed, all those things matter. And so again, someone’s always watching.”

Fortunately for UNC Charlotte, Bailey is a model of consistency in putting the best foot forward and doesn’t plan on slipping up anytime soon.

While he may be the school’s lead man, his day-to-day performances are no show. Bailey deeply cares about his work and the students he works with and is someone Charlotte students are lucky to have.



Courtesy of UNC Charlotte

A guide to Charlotte's Black-owned businesses

Wes Packham | Asst. Arts & Culture Editor

Black-owned businesses are an integral part of both Charlotte's economy and culture. With Black History Month kicking off, here are some Black-owned businesses from throughout the Charlotte metropolitan area.

Leah & Louise

The James Beard Award-nominated Greg Collier created Leah & Louise in collaboration with wife and business partner Subrina Collier. The duo describes their establishment as a modern-day spin on a juke joint, historically being places for food, music, dancing and drinking.

The cuisine features modern interpretations of Southern classics focused on utilizing seasonal and regional foods to promote food sustainability.

Leah & Louise first opened in 2020 in Camp North End and has steadily grown to be a great spot for authentic Southern dining. In that foundational year, they also welcomed former Vice President Kamala Harris to the restaurant.

Archive CLT

Archive CLT is located in West Charlotte and

operates as a cafe and coffee shop. While also serving food and beverages, it also provides a cultural hub for showcasing and preserving the art, history and culture of Black individuals and communities.

The space offers events and educational initiatives for attendees to learn more about Black history. Founder Cheryse Terry brought her concept to fruition in 2021 after raising \$40,000 through grassroots funding in just 40 days.

Archive CLT was previously featured on The Today Show, where they showcased Terry's personal collection of art, vintage collectibles and furniture in the Mint Museum.

Mert's Heart & Soul

In 1998, Georgia native James Bazzelle founded Mert's Heart & Soul in downtown Charlotte. One of the few restaurants downtown at the time, Bazzelle helped pioneer Charlotte's city center and contributed to its growth.

Mert's Heart & Soul is known for distinguishing itself from traditional soul food restaurants, serving Lowcountry and Gullah-inspired dishes.

Since opening, the restaurant has become an

acclaimed spot by both visitors and Charlotte natives alike.

704 Shop

704 Shop was founded in 2013 with the goal to be Charlotte's original lifestyle and apparel brand. 704 Shop offers a variety of collections, including 704 Brand, City of Charlotte, UNC Charlotte and fan gear for the Charlotte Hornets and Carolina Panthers.

Their brand often collaborates with other Charlotte-based clients to bring unique products to customers.

704 Shop previously partnered with UNC Charlotte to provide fans with rally shirts for the team's season opener.

The Watson Law Office

UNC Charlotte alumnus Kyle Watson founded his law practice in 2022 after graduating from the University of South Carolina School of Law.

He garnered over \$1 million in settlements in his first year, proving to be one of the city's most talented emerging attorneys. Watson was also named among the top '40 under 40' by the Na-

tional Black Lawyers.

While Watson graduated from UNC Charlotte in 2015, he is still involved with the University, serving as an advisor to UNC Charlotte's Mock Trial program and helping to mentor the next generation of lawyers.

Manifest Market CLT

Manifest Market CLT is an organization focused on creating pop-up markets for smaller businesses in Charlotte to grow and share their products. They host regular markets where vendors are free to apply to be sellers.

Manifest Market CLT strives to create a supportive space for smaller businesses to grow and thrive by creating curated markets with various products, including handmade goods, accessories, clothing and more.

Charlotte Black-Owned

For more information relating to Black-owned businesses in Charlotte, follow the Charlotte Black-Owned Instagram at www.instagram.com/cltblackowned.



Courtesy of Archive CLT



Courtesy of Mert's Heart & Soul



Courtesy of Leah & Louise



Courtesy of Watson Law Office



Courtesy of 704 Shop



Courtesy of Manifest Market

Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. expected to complete Charlotte's Divine 9 in fall 2025

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

Dan Rice/Niner Times & courtesy of UNC Charlotte

While UNC Charlotte is well known for its diversity, the University is a predominantly white institution (PWI). 49.7% of the student body is white, while only 16.5% are Black or African American. Despite these statistics, the University has a large community involved in the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), commonly known as the Divine Nine through high attendance at events such as the annual Yard Show.

UNC Charlotte also honored the Divine Nine by placing plaques dedicated to each chapter in the Star Quad, a spot on campus that holds a significant amount of its history. The Star Quad was given its name from the Divine Nine because it has been their chosen spot for the Yard Show, one of the largest Greek Life events to date at Charlotte.

If able to bring an undergraduate chapter of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc., UNC Charlotte will not only be one of the few institutions in the UNC system schools but also the nation with all nine chapters within the Divine Nine.

These chapters include Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. and Zeta Phi Beta, Sorority, Inc.; Charlotte hosts all but Iota Phi Theta.

Iota Phi Theta was founded in 1963 at Morgan State University and has over 300 chapters nationwide and 75,000 initiated members. The fraternity prides itself on following its purpose: "The development and perpetuation of Scholarship, Leadership, Citizenship, Fidelity and Brotherhood among Men."

The journey to complete the Divine Nine has been anything but short. 2025 marks 55 years since Greek Life was first welcomed to UNC Charlotte's campus.

As Greek Life's presence has been steadily expanding on Charlotte's campus, the idea of Iota Phi Theta at UNC Charlotte is not new.

In 2012, a small group of students tried bringing Iota Phi Theta to life. While they were able to initiate three members, the group was never officially established, and after those students graduated, the group lost steam once again.

Thirteen years later, what has long since been a dormant dream has now come back to life, as Michelle Guobadia, the director of the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (OFSL), explained that she has seen a peak in momentum from not only current students but alums for bringing Iota Phi Theta to campus.

"We are really mindful and conscious in our office to advertise fraternity and sorority life in a way that anyone on campus can see themselves in it. We really don't advertise in any stereotypi-

cal way," said Guobadia. "I want anyone on campus to see themselves in Greek Life, especially people who never thought they would be Greek because they thought it was only done one way. And I think for someone whose experience was like that, it's really important for me to show that as a director."

Since joining Iota Phi Theta as graduates, alumni have returned to the Charlotte campus and attended NPHC events such as the Yard Show or strolling competitions repping Iota Phi Theta. Alongside other students, they have hosted tailgates during game day in the 49th Acre with the rest of Greek Life in the 2024 season.

There are only seven undergraduate chapters of Iota Phi Theta throughout North Carolina and two alumni chapters. The only UNC System school with a chapter is East Carolina University. One of the alumni chapters, founded in 1981, is in the city of Charlotte.

To finally charter and establish Iota Phi Theta at UNC Charlotte, the group must be able to draft a document that officially states the fraternity's affiliation with the school and meet certain requirements.

"We've been trying for several years to charter on campus. I think this year, we've just had more of that momentum of consistently seeing this group at the Yard Show, at the stroll competition and at other events the NPHC has done," said Guobadia.

Despite the recent surge in interest, Guobadia says there is still plenty of work to be done to officially assemble the chapter.

"It's a hard process. When you're chartering any organization, it doesn't even have to be an NPHC one; it's easier when you have students on the ground who are already interested," said Guobadia.

With the hopes that this goal is reached, the OFSL and Guobadia plan to support the men of Iota Phi Theta while strengthening the reputation and relationship between the Greek community and campus.

"Our plan for them [Divine Nine] is the plan we have for all of our groups. We want them to grow to sizes that they're comfortable with as members," said Guobadia. "We want them to continue doing amazing philanthropy and service work that they already do in abundance, and we want them to really use the fraternity and sorority community as that co-curricular experience. We want that for all of our groups, but we want that to continue to flourish in NPHC for sure."

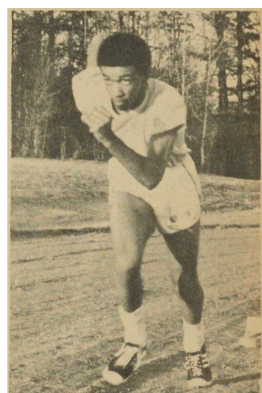
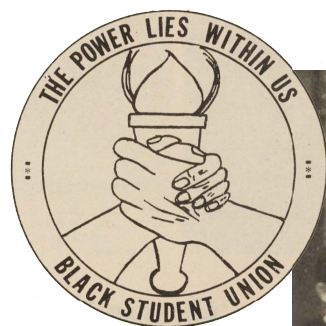
Guobadia has been the director of UNC Charlotte's OFSL since 2008 and has witnessed firsthand the growth of the Greek community.

"I think people already think NPHC is a pretty impressive Council," said Guobadia. "I think having all nine, which is really rare, particularly in a predominantly white institution, [will] put us in another stratosphere that this is a place where students can come and have options."

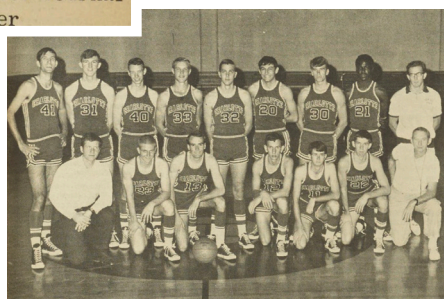
Although nothing is set in stone, interest meetings and events are expected to occur closer to the fall 2025 semester, as the official UNC Charlotte chapter of Iota Phi Beta is still not confirmed but is expected to charter on campus in late 2025.



BLACK HISTORY



Ben Chavis, a one hundred yard dash specialist, displays his fleet form for Journal photographer



1967

Several of UNC Charlotte's first Black athletes make their debut for Charlotte Athletics. The list of athletes includes Harold Cohen, Frank Coley, Benjamin Chavis Jr. and Maurice McClettie on track, and Thomas James 'T.J.' Reddy on the men's basketball team.

1965

The first four-year graduating class at Charlotte College includes one Black student. Later that year, Charlotte College was renamed to UNC Charlotte.



March 1969

Charlotte hires its first Black faculty member, Justin E. Uchendu, to teach an introductory course on African history during the spring.

February 1969

UNC Charlotte students form the Black Student Union (BSU) on Feb. 26 after civil rights activist Reginald Hawkins holds a vigil at UNC Charlotte on Feb. 7.

The vigil was for the one-year anniversary of the Orangeburg Massacre, in which South Carolina Highway Patrol officers opened fire on a group of Black student protestors in South Carolina, killing three and injuring 28. During the vigil, students Benjamin Chavis Jr. and Ronald Caldwell replaced the American flag with a solid black flag at half-mast. The protestors planned to keep flying the flag for three days. The University removed the flag later that day and denied requests to reinstate it for the remainder of the three days.

After the removal of the black flag, the continued efforts of Black students on Charlotte's campus leads to the formation of what would later become the Department of Africana Studies.

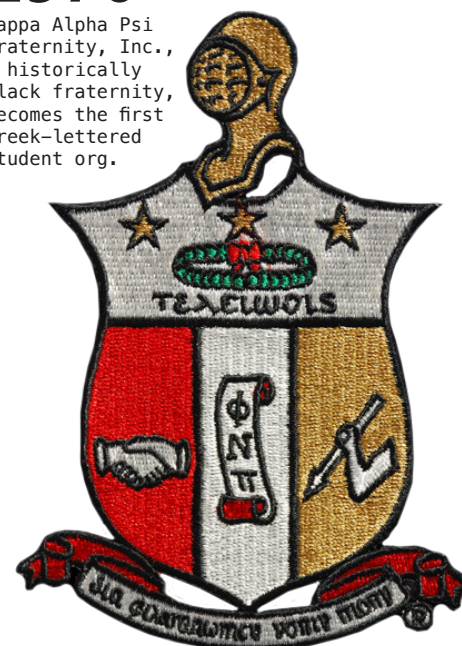
1972

Thirteen women establish the Iota Rho Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., the first Black sorority on campus.



1970

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., a historically Black fraternity, becomes the first Greek-lettered student org.



1973

The BSU sponsors its first Black People's Convocation, focusing on the theme "Working together, we can make a change."



Read more at
ninertimes.com



2021

The Black Alumni Chapter is founded to support Black students and encourage alumni participation.

2020

UNC Charlotte student Josh Mason organizes and leads a Black Lives Matter march in hopes of unifying the UNC Charlotte community after the death of George Floyd on May 25. This four-mile march started at the Five Guys on North Tryon and ended on the steps of the Student Union.

2016

BSU holds a sit-in at the Student Union in an effort of protest and solidarity regarding Keith Lamont Scott, a Black man killed by police near campus.

2024

“Phase XVI” residence hall is named after alumnus and first-gen student Dontá L. Wilson. Wilson is the chief consumer and small business banking officer for Truist Bank and vice chair of Charlotte’s Board of Trustees. The University honors Wilson for his commitment to spreading HOPE, “Helping Other People Excel.”



2014

Benjamin Chavis Jr. returns to UNC Charlotte’s campus as part of the Alumni Association’s Celebrating African American Legacies event. He is widely known as the “Father of the Environmental Justice Movement,” and has spent his life advocating for racial equality.



2009

Popp-Martin Student Union opened as Charlotte’s first building named after a Black man. Its namesake, Desmond T. Martin, a ‘97 alumnus, was a student body president and part of a group of student leaders to meet Rosa Parks.

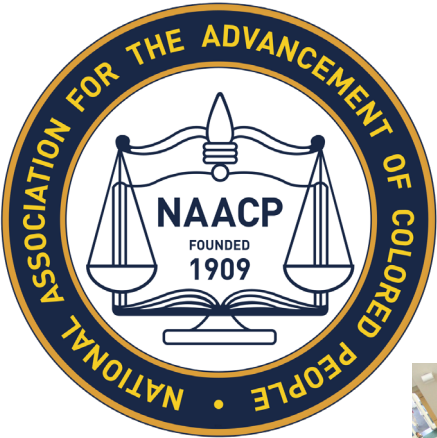


1992

UNC Charlotte Black student enrollment surpasses 1,000.

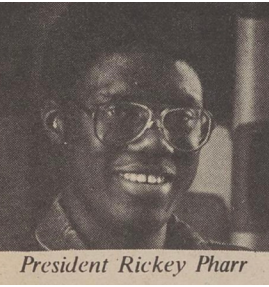
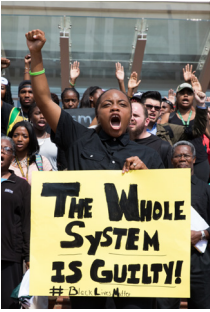
1994

UNC Charlotte hosts its first-ever Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration. Between 130 and 150 attended.



1981

UNC Charlotte’s NAACP chapter is founded by members of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and vice president of the regional chapter, Kelly Alexander Jr.



1976

UNC Charlotte elects its first Black Student Body President, Rickey B. Pharr.

1977

Cedric ‘Cornbread’ Maxwell, Charlotte basketball alumni, is drafted by the Boston Celtics as the No. 12 overall pick of the 1977 NBA Draft, spending 11 years in the league and winning two championships.



AT UNC CHARLOTTE



How stepping and strolling display a legacy of community and culture

Emsley Jackson | Opinion Editor

Cairo Smith & Sunnya Hadavi/Niner Times File

Finding your social foundation can be integral to a successful and fulfilling college experience.

In the not-too-distant past, finding this foundation was all the more difficult for Black students on majority-white campuses. This Black History Month, amidst threats to erase and silence stories of diversity, equity and inclusion, it is even more important to tell the stories of communities found.

Greek Life was originally only for white men enrolled in universities. According to an article by Best Colleges, “Women created sororities in response to the fraternities’ refusal to admit them. Subsequently, when Black students began to enroll in universities, they faced the same issue. So, they created the first Black Greek-letter organization.”

traditions is that of performance-based stepping and strolling.

With nods to popular culture and African influences, stepping is best described as “the syn-copated, percussive rhythms that emerge from the marriage of precise and stylized movements of the body [that] capture the audio and visual imaginations of observers.”

Modern stepping and strolling are credited to the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) existing in the early 1900s. It began as a way to show white-only organizations on campuses glimpses of African culture.

For third-year DJ Oliver, chapter president of Alpha Phi Alpha at Charlotte, strolling is a means of bonding.

“For us, it’s a way of connecting with the older generation of brothers; That’s something that they can always come and support,” said Oliver. “We do these shows, and you’ll always see older brothers, brothers who come back from the 2010s, even earlier. We had brothers come back from the ‘90s during stroll comp.”

Stepping is very present in popular culture and media,

with movies like “Stomp the

Yard,” trends on social media

and music being made specifically for or associated with Black Greek Life.

Step competitions, yard shows, stroll-offs and other ways of performing routines are heavily anticipated and attended. They unify members of the present, honor members of the past and further elaborate on the tradition for members of the future.

“If you understand your fraternity’s history, you understand more of its value. Our fraternity’s history has a lot of great brothers, Martin Luther King Jr., W. E. B. Du Bois and others who do a really great job of civic engagement and doing things for their community,” said Oliver. “You learn the history, and you learn how to fall in line with that. You want to continue that great legacy of service to the community.”

in response to the racism Black students experienced on campuses.”

Since the establishment of Alpha Phi Alpha in 1906, eight other organizations followed, forming the National Panhellenic Council, or the Divine Nine, so that students could have unity on their own individual campuses.

As with all organizations, time gives way to precedence and traditions rooted in the very soil they grew out of. One of these

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“You learn that history, and you learn how to fall in line with that. You want to continue that great legacy of service to the community.”

- DJ Oliver, president of the Mu Tau Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.



DIVINE 9 ORGANIZATIONS IN UNC CHARLOTTE'S NATIONAL PAN-HELLENIC COUNCIL



**MU TAU CHAPTER OF
ALPHA PHI ALPHA
FRATERNITY, INC.**

@THEMUTAUCHAPTER
FOUNDING YEAR: 1977
NICKNAME: ALPHAS



**KAPPA KAPPA CHAPTER
OF ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA
SORORITY, INC.**

@KAPPAKAPPA_AKA
FOUNDING YEAR: 1976
NICKNAME: AKAS



**ZETA DELTA CHAPTER
OF KAPPA ALPHA PSI
FRATERNITY, INC.**

@ZDNUPES
FOUNDING YEAR: 1970
NICKNAME: KAPPAS



**IOTA RHO CHAPTER OF
DELTA SIGMA THETA
SORORITY, INC.**

@IOTARHO1972
FOUNDING YEAR: 1972
NICKNAME: DELTAS



**RHO GAMMA CHAPTER
OF PHI BETA SIGMA
FRATERNITY, INC.**

@RHOGAMMASIGMAS
FOUNDING YEAR: 1988
NICKNAME: SIGMAS



**UPSILON XI CHAPTER OF
ZETA PHI BETA SORORITY,
INC.**

@UPSILON_XI
FOUNDING YEAR: 1991
NICKNAME: ZETAS



**NU RHO CHAPTER OF
SIGMA GAMMA RHO
SORORITY, INC.**

@NURHOPOODLES
FOUNDING YEAR: 1993
NICKNAME: SGRHOS



**EPSILON ZETA CHAPTER
OF OMEGA PSI PHI**

@EZ_QUES
FOUNDING YEAR: 1911
NICKNAME: QUES

From success to strategy: How Charlotte women's basketball is piecing the puzzle for a new identity

Kelli Blackburn | Sports Editor

Charlotte women's basketball has transitioned into a fresh start for the 2024-2025 season as they embrace new challenges and opportunities to shape a new identity. Head Coach Tomekia Reed was hired on April 25, 2024, bringing a history of success and a reputation for building winning programs.

Through the transition, Coach Reed brought with her junior guard Hayleigh Breland, whose journey with Reed began at Jackson State University (JSU), a historically Black university. Together, they are laying the foundation for a new era in Charlotte basketball.

Reed and Breland are piecing together a strategy like a puzzle, with Reed bringing the tools and vision and Breland serving as the cornerstone to create something great.

Reed's career began in 2006 as a recruiting coordinator, with stops at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, The University of Southern Mississippi, Louisiana Tech University and the University of New Orleans. In 2018, she took her first head coaching job at JSU, where she quickly established herself as a force to be reckoned with in college basketball.

In 2022, Reed led the Tigers to their third Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) tournament championship and their first NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Tournament appearance.

Just two hours away in Wiggins, Miss., Breland was making a name for herself at Stone High School. As a junior, Breland led the state in scoring with 24.2 points per game. By the time she graduated in 2022, she was the No. 1-ranked guard in Mississippi. Reed saw her potential and took a leap of faith, bringing Breland to JSU.

"Hayleigh was the only freshman that I recruited, and we ended up signing her teammate as well. But, in order to play for me as a freshman, you had to come in and be an amazing player," said Reed. "[And] that's what she was. She just had to catch up because we had so much experience on the team. She [just] kind of had to get in that groove. She quickly got there, but she came in [as] a big-time player."

Since then, the duo have been interlocked as Reed's success meshed quickly with Breland's. Breland kept climbing her way to the top, putting in the hard work to increase playing time. Not only did she win her way over on the court, but she also won the locker room. She was named a captain for the Tigers in her freshman year.

Breland's leadership became the forefront of her success, landing a lasting impression through her ability to lead on and off the court. When Reed decided to accept the Charlotte job, Breland was one of the first players she thought to bring along.

"When I got the job here, I said, 'I need somebody who's not going to be afraid to lead, some-

body who's not going to be afraid to be a voice in the locker room. [I need] someone who can clearly translate to the team who I really am and what I'm really about,'" said Reed. "I identified a couple of players I could have brought, but I felt like she would be one who could have that voice and [also] be one who can be great within the conference and play basketball."

Although Reed had her cornerstone piece to the new puzzle of Charlotte women's basketball, her vision extended beyond Breland. She added senior guard Madison Roshelle and graduate student guard Daphane White during the offseason, both of whom were also part of her team at JSU.

Additionally, transfer portal players like graduate student guard Kay Kay Green and graduate student center Jayla Kelly were ones that Reed did not want to pass up on. The work of putting these new players together also comes with looking at the bigger picture—finding the identity of a team.

"Putting it together has been a struggle because you're taking the best players from these programs, bringing them together and trying to get them to sometimes be successful. [You know,] to change roles," said Reed. "It's been tough, but I think everybody is starting to understand how we [are] supposed to fit together. [And] so, that transfer portal is really important."

Nov. 4, 2024, marked a milestone as the 49ers secured their first win under Reed with a 77-63 victory. Breland contributed 13 points, six rebounds and five steals, showcasing her growth and leadership.

Her standout moment came on Nov. 21, when she exploded for 30 points in a win over Gardner-Webb University. Through her hard work, determination and support from Coach Reed, Breland led the team to its third win of the season.

"It was just a surreal moment. I was really proud of myself," said Breland. "I know a lot of people [were really] proud. My mom was really excited."

Despite the flashes of brilliance, the team has faced its share of adversity. A six-game losing streak in AAC play tested their resolve. For Breland, the key has been staying focused on improvement and becoming 1% better every day.

"We got to find out what we do best and just keep going at that and find that. [And] when the games get tough when we [are] doing good when we [are] doing bad, we got to always remain positive," said Breland. "You know, calm, relaxed and just figure out our identity."

For Reed, the process of creating a new identity is as much about life lessons as it is about basketball. As the 49ers continue their journey, one thing is clear: The puzzle is still coming together, but with Reed's strategy and Breland's leadership, Charlotte women's basketball is building something special.



Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

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“But, in order to play for me as a freshman, you had to come in and be an amazing player.”

- Tomekia Reed, women's basketball head coach



Ragean Hill is building champions and breaking barriers for Charlotte Athletics

Kelli Blackburn | Sports Editor

For Ragean Hill, building champions through Charlotte Athletics means shaping lives both on and off the field—a mission that has made her a beacon for the 49er community and beyond.

As the executive associate athletics director and a lead sports administrator overseeing football, women's basketball and the inaugural women's lacrosse program, Hill has dedicated herself to the well-being and success of Charlotte's student-athletes. Her impact resonates far beyond campus, making her a shining example for the 49ers community and beyond.

Hill's influence extends nationally as she has worked game-day operations for the College Football Playoff National Championship in recent years and is an active member of the Women Leaders in College Sports organization. Her journey to Charlotte, however, was anything but traditional.

From track to trailblazer

Once a track and field student-athlete at Kansas State University (KSU), Hill initially pursued a degree in medicine. But after realizing her passion lay elsewhere, she shifted gears, starting her own personal training business before enrolling in the Disney College Program for Walt Disney World. There, she gained leadership and customer service skills that inspired her to return to KSU for her master's degree.

As a graduate student, Hill became an assistant academic advisor, laying the foundation for a career in sports administration. Stints at the University of Nebraska and the University of Wisconsin helped her refine her expertise in academic counseling and also get a touch of diversity programming.

However, it was at the University of Arkansas in 2013 that her passion for student-athlete development truly flourished. As director of academics, she not only led student-athlete services but also played a key role in a \$24 million facility plan to enhance their resources.

Championing diversity and inclusion

Having experienced the challenges of being a student-athlete herself, Hill is passionate about creating equitable opportunities for others. Her work focuses on supporting underrepresented groups, students with disabilities and those from marginalized backgrounds to give a safe outlet for anyone that crosses her path.

"It's not just black and white all the time. It is folks with learning disabilities, underrepresented populations," said Hill. "And so working in that space, if I can provide student-athletes what I didn't receive as a student-athlete to get them that much further and make sure that they're able to transition well and graduate and win championships, [then] that's what we're going to do."

Hill carried this mission into her next role at Old Dominion University, where she became associate athletic director and senior woman administrator in 2017. During her tenure, she led the development of the Monarchs' women's volleyball team, including the hiring of its first head coach—a blueprint she is now using to launch Charlotte's women's lacrosse team.

Building a winning culture

Hill joined Charlotte Athletics in 2019, bringing her vision and determination to the 49ers. Now, as the program prepares for the debut of its women's lacrosse team, Hill's leadership continues to shine. With Head Coach Clare Short and a talented roster coming together, Hill is confident in the team's future.

"I had kind of a blueprint [at Old Dominion,]" said Hill. "And then now we just gotta get to the finish line for Feb. 8 to get this game going and then start the season."

Her dedication to building a winning culture extends across all sports at Charlotte. Whether it is providing resources, mentoring student-athletes or working with coaches, Hill ensures every athlete is set up for success—both in the classroom and on the field.

Breaking barriers and empowering others

As the only person of color in Charlotte Athletics' administration office, Hill recognizes the importance of representation and uses her platform as a Black woman to inspire change and growth, especially among other women. She strives to make sports a more inclusive and equitable space, guided by what she calls her "gender equity lens."

"I think our story is starting to be told more, but we're in a new era again," said Hill. "So, what does that look like 10 years from now, five years from now, five hours from now? I don't know. All I can do in my space is make sure I'm doing everything in my power to make sure these student-athletes understand that they have people to come to in this department that is going to support them 100%."

Hill's ability to connect with people and build inclusive environments has made her a trusted leader. Her philosophy is simple but impactful: treat people with kindness and recognize the value of differences. Whether it is giving a piece of advice, helping with classes or working with the communication between coaches and players, Hill has made sure to use her platform to get her student-athletes across the stage, whether it be for a championship ring or a college diploma.

A legacy of unity

For Hill, sports are more than competition—they are a unifying force. Through her work, Hill continues to champion the power of athletics to break barriers and bring people together. At Charlotte, she wants to build a space where student-athletes and alumni can always come back to and call home.

By letting her work speak for itself, her success has given her an abundance of opportunities and communities in which she can spread her outreach. To young women and adults today, she is still making sure she pours into their cups by giving them pieces of advice to carry with them as they grow into who they strive to be.

"Be celebrated," said Hill. "Don't be tolerated."

Hill's success and legacy is one of transformation, leadership and inclusion—a legacy that will continue to shape the lives of student-athletes for years to come.



"Be celebrated.
Don't be tolerated."

- Ragean Hill, executive associate athletics director

Courtesy of Ragean Hill

Black artists who are making Charlotte their canvas

Kendall Maye | Arts & Culture Editor

Courtesy of Adé Hogue, Abel Jackson, Dru Swan, Jamil Dyair Steele



Adé Hogue

Acherished alumnus of UNC Charlotte, Adé Hogue was a multi-faceted graphic designer, art director and letterer. He started as an engineering student, but after taking a drawing class in college, he found his calling in a more creative space. A 2012 graduate of the College of Arts + Architecture with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design, Hogue moved to Chicago and worked with many large brands such as Nike and Netflix to make their artistic ideas a reality.

Finding early success with his uniquely bold lettering style, Hogue became a popular public speaker at various conferences and lectures related to the arts.

Additionally, he taught part-time at DePaul University and remained an active member of the UNC Charlotte community by generously passing on the wisdom he acquired to other design students.

Unfortunately, in 2021, Hogue passed away after being involved in an accident in which a vehicle hit his bike while training for a race. Hogue is remembered by many in the art community as a humble visionary with a warm and humorous personality. His art will continue to inspire others for generations.



Abel Jackson

African-American culture is at the heart of Abel Jackson's pieces. With a noticeably vibrant and colorful art style, Jackson has created countless murals in the Queen City, many of which reflect moments in Black history.

The artist developed an interest in creativity as a child, drawing pictures from his imagination whenever he could. He graduated Winthrop University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, concentrating on illustration and graphic design. Airbrushing became his favorite medium, which he carried on into his career, allowing him to create anywhere without limits.

Much of Jackson's work around Charlotte depicts stunning scenes of empowered Black people and historical figures from the city, like attorney and civil rights leader J. Charles Jones. Jackson's art commemorates their work and encourages everyone to learn more about their heritage.



Dru Swan

As a fourth-year UNC Charlotte student in the College of Art + Architecture, Dru Swan is an artist who always strives to create atmospheric pieces that resonate with others. As a painting major, she enjoys utilizing oil paint in her work, as well as displaying life drawings, Black figures and nature.

In every piece she does, Swan wants to make people feel safe and welcomed, something she has not always been able to experience as a biracial person of color. Finding places where she is embraced has not been easy, so she is using her art as a safe space where others can be comfortable.

Striving to make people feel good, Swan often paints portraits that capture the human essence in serene colors and unique compositions.

Many of her works have been included in exhibits, such as the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture.

In December of 2024, Swan created a painting for Wike Graham, the division chief of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Fire Department. The piece is comprised of important aspects that make Charlotte such a unique city, including a hornet's nest and a statue of Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg.



Jamil Dyair Steele

Passionate about encouraging his students to follow their artistic dreams, Jamil Dyair Steele has been a teacher for over a decade at every level of education. In his own time, he exercises his art skills by painting murals in his hometown of West Charlotte.

Dyair's works can be found throughout Charlotte, standing as a testament to his artistry and his commitment to the community. Notable works include "Charlotte, Past, Present, and Future Mural," found in Charlotte's Historic West End, four murals adorning the Amaze Apartments in NoDa and a 190-foot mural on the underpass of I-77 and West Trade St, commemorating the rich history of the area.

In 2018, Dyair led the About Face Charlotte's Blessing Box Campaign as the primary artist. Dyair's Black Lives Matter mural, created in 2020, now resides within the Mint Museum's permanent collection. Dyair has been recognized nationally, previously appearing on the Kelly Clarkson Show and has been recognized as one of Charlotte's most influential figures by QCity Metro.



Opinion: A threat to DEI is a threat to Black history

Ava Harris | Asst. Opinion Editor
Dan Rice/Niner Times File

Fears of the 'woke agenda' have plagued the American zeitgeist for years. They quickly made it into early education policies and have begun to dig their claws into higher education.

The UNC System made the controversial decision to strike diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives from its schools' offices, including UNC Charlotte's, in August of 2024.

Now, the first Black History Month without DEI has rolled around, and per the new policy, Charlotte will not mention Black History Month events or celebrations. This may leave Niners wondering how leaving DEI in the dust could have been the best decision.

While the UNC System's stance is not as rigid as other institutions, it sets the stage for a slippery slope toward the same sentiment. As seen in Texas universities, an anti-DEI law passed by the Texas legislature goes so far as to audit universities attempting to establish initiatives deemed too similar to DEI, forcing universities like UT Austin to sweep their websites for potential 'DEI terms.'

These terms included "colonizer," "Latino" and "gay." This is all in favor of so-called 'neutrality.' These systems want to tell their students they do not see color, whether that be the shades of race or the hues of a pride flag.

In this context, colorblindness is simply a sweeter phrase for ignorance. Choosing to ignore a problem does not make it disappear, just as turning a blind eye to our differences does not erase a centuries-long history of systemic oppression. As generations of Black Americans continue to suffer the consequences of practices like real estate redlining, mass incarceration and

job discrimination, it is ridiculous to think it is somehow offensive to acknowledge those generations' existence, experiences and struggles.

Texas, North Carolina, the UNC System and the United States as a whole have a responsibility to ensure we never forget the horrors millions of people were subjected to that effectively built and shaped this country.

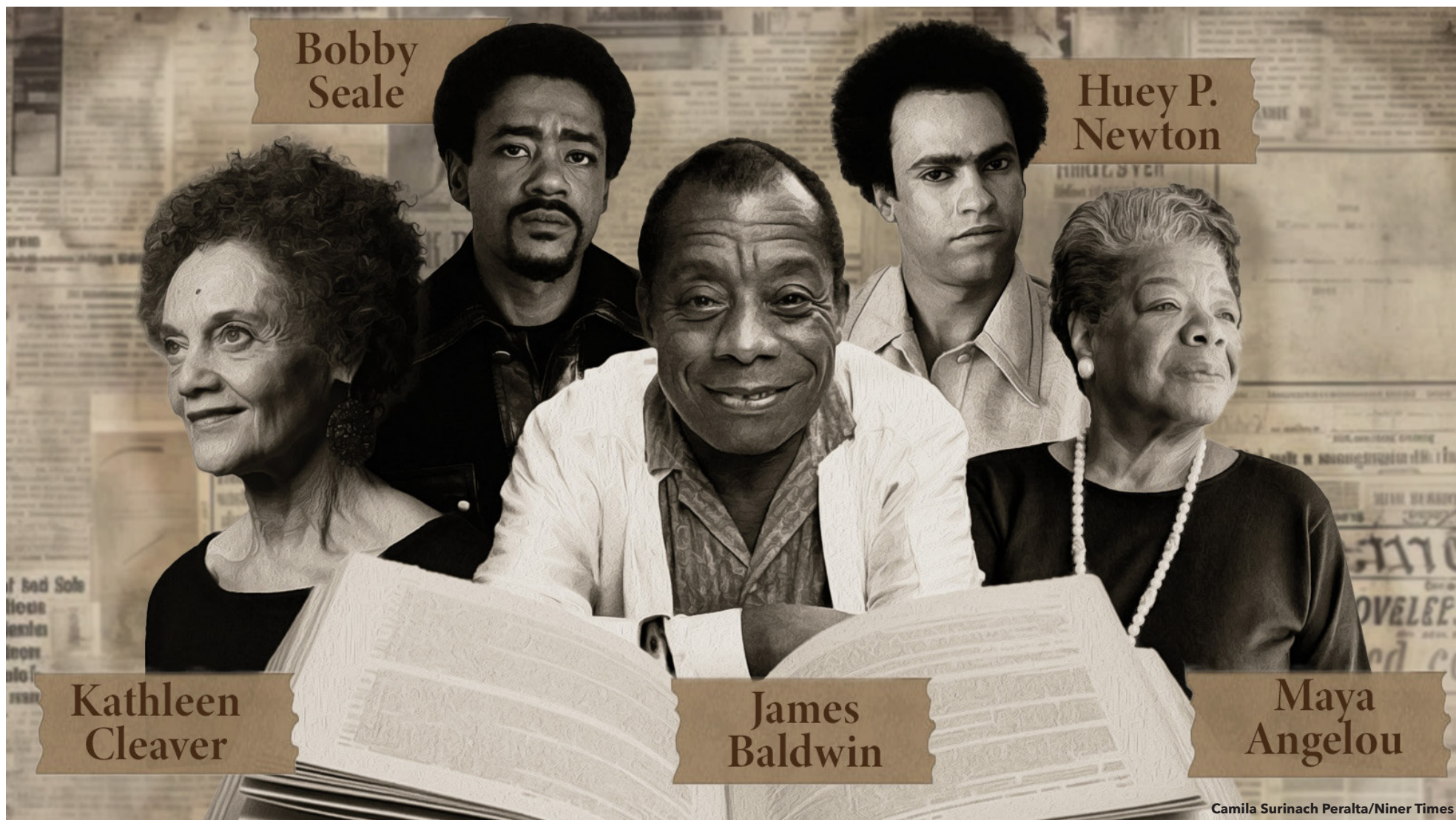
An ignored wound will not heal but fester and infect over time. The Civil Rights Movement ended less than 60 years ago. The cut inflicted upon the Black community still bleeds and will only worsen as it goes unrecognized.

DEI initiatives were a step in the direction of progress toward necessary social awareness. Efforts to foster a more inclusive and just world must start at the grassroots level, including our schools and universities.

Charlotte's Black students and faculty deserve celebration; Black history deserves recognition; the resilience, perseverance and dedication of civil rights leaders deserve a platform. This is why we celebrate Black History Month in the first place. The UNC System Board of Governors is more worried about preserving the feelings of those without a month dedicated to their identity than it is about teaching its students and faculty the reasons others do.

As our political and social landscape only grow more polarized, it is important now more than ever to celebrate our marginalized communities and stop closing our eyes to history just because it is uncomfortable. Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it, and those who feign colorblindness are doomed to bolster ignorance.





Opinion: The Civil Rights Movement is more than Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Amari Andrews | Staff Writer

While Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy is still felt years after his death, there are many activists from the Civil Rights Movement era who are overlooked despite being just as influential.

In American social studies classes, the Civil Rights Movement is summarized by King's "I Have a Dream" speech. This leads to many significant events and activists being disregarded due to a white-washed narrative being taught to young children.

Yes, King's "I Have a Dream" speech was a very important event, historically speaking, but this was not the only event that was a turning point for the Civil Rights Movement.

Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale are two very important figures who became notable during the civil rights era for co-founding "The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense" in 1966. The

Black Panthers' approach to racial injustice was to confront the problem face-to-face.

On May 2, 1967, The Black Panthers entered the California State Capitol building with guns, which was legal at the time, to protest the police brutality happening to Black people around the country. This was something never seen before at the time, and it made people realize the lengths the party was willing to go to for racial injustice.

Although this party was known to be more violent than other activists, many long-lasting effects came from the group. One of them is The Free Breakfast for Children program, which was established in 1969 by the women of The Black Panther Party. This move established the breakfast programs we have in schools today.

The Civil Rights Movement also pushed many Black writers to talk about the oppression and injustice they faced during the period. Writers

such as Maya Angelou, James Baldwin and Alice Walker remain very influential today for speaking out about the life of a Black person while also talking about love, sexuality and identity.

Maya Angelou is a name that became most influential due to her autobiography "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings." The novel gives first-hand details of Angelou's childhood living in the Jim Crow South, and the racism and abuse Black Southerners faced at the time. In this novel, the caged bird represents the restrictions held upon Black people, especially segregation and their lack of freedoms at the time.

James Baldwin's novel, "The Fire Next Time," was released in 1963. This book, and many others, cemented Baldwin's ability to tell the story of societal issues faced by Black Americans, from the emancipation of enslaved people to the Civil Rights Movement, where nothing in America

had changed even after the Emancipation Proclamation.

The writing of same-sex relationships was something very faintly seen around the world, and Baldwin challenged the thoughts of many people through this type of writing while also being a voice during the gay liberation movement through his book "Giovanni's Room."

The influence of King should never be underestimated because of his efforts for racial equality and justice for all, which are still felt today.

However, many activists marched alongside King for the same problem and should be remembered every day for their bravery in being outspoken about their determination to change the way of living in the United States.