

## Hip-hop group promotes diversity, inclusion at performance

**Hanna Lesky**

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Leaders of student organization Herman@os Orgullos@s en Las Americas said they brought hip-hop group Rebel Diaz to campus to entertain and educate attendees on the racial inequality that affects many cities, including Asheville.

"At the end of the day, I want Rebel Diaz to be bringing people together that normally wouldn't be together at UNCA, and so I think that this will be a catalyst for that," said **UNC Asheville senior Kaley Fry, co-president of HOLA.**

The group led a workshop to teach students about hip-hop and immigration before playing a show later in the evening. Rodstarz and G1 of Rebel Diaz explained hip-hop emerged after minorities were kicked out

of their homes and pushed to live together after the building of the Cross Bronx Expressway.

"The shocking thing is that if you look at a map of Asheville during Jim Crow segregation, and you look at a map of Asheville now - like a real estate map - you'll see that Asheville is more diverse during segregation than it is now," said **junior Reid Drake, co-president of HOLA.**

Asheville city planners used infrastructure to cut through and displace the black population, Drake and Fry said.

"The way the segregated neighborhoods were set up, black and white citizens had to cross through each other's space to go anywhere," Drake said.

Drake said you will not see many minorities in Asheville

unless you seek them out.

"The city planners thought that a better Asheville would be a whiter Asheville basically. And so throughout time, and in Asheville the city, they have pushed minority communities out of downtown and segregated them to neighborhoods on the outside," Fry said.

This is part of the process called gentrification, a tactic that replaces minority communities with affluent, mostly white ones.

"In terms of gentrification, urban renewal, highway expansion, housing prices and shifting demographics has meant changes in residential neighborhood patterns. All of which is to say Asheville has changed a great deal," said **political science professor Kenneth Betsalel.**

Betsalel teaches two service-

learning designated courses, Civic Engagement in Community and ReStorying Community, which deal with oral histories about these issues.

"At one point, African-Americans were close to a quarter of the city's population. Urban renewal in the late 1950s through the late 1970s, along with highway expansion, had a major impact on African-American neighborhoods. Today the African-American population is around 12 to 14 percent," Betsalel said.

HOLA works on raising awareness on issues like this, Fry said.

"HOLA is mainly a Latino outreach group, and so we try to educate the student body as well as ourselves and connect with the Latino community within Asheville and within the wider U.S. region," Fry said.

Fry said Rebel Diaz begins its shows by getting the audience to shout, "People power."

"One of the reasons we wanted to do this was because the music that Rebel Diaz puts out is very conscious and critical, and we believe that that's fundamentally at the heart of HOLA and what HOLA is doing, so we felt that our politics aligned," Fry said.

HOLA brought Rebel Diaz to campus as part of its annual Latin American poetry festival.

"What I wanted to do is kind of to show to communities off campus that UNCA can be a place that is inclusive. I think the university kind of has a reputation among immigrant communities, communities of color, communities that are not highly represented here on campus and around Asheville, as being disconnected," Drake said.

## Housing bill to help lower-income families, housing industry

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North Carolina's housing market may be about to change in an unexpected way, pending the approval of a bill concerning mobile homes.

Earlier this month, North Carolina Rep. Nathan Ramsey filed House Bill 769, a piece of legislation that would prevent North Carolina counties from controlling the location of manufactured housing.

According to city of Asheville officials, the bill would only largely affect the more rural areas of Buncombe County, and current residents should not fear the loss of property value.

"Every time there is a proposal like this, there is some perception that property values might be lowered in certain communities because the doors open to inferior stock, and that's something that might lower the standard that

maintains a certain value for people," said **Jeff Staudinger, community development director at the city of Asheville office.** "It's really more of an issue that will impact the rural areas."

House Bill 769 would put a restriction against county zoning on the location of manufactured housing for single-family use.

"Manufactured housing is just housing that is constructed offsite and then moved to a permanent site," Staudinger said. "It is generally of equal quality as housing that is built on site."

Staudinger said mobile homes provide a clear representation of manufactured housing in Asheville.

"Modern mobile homes are well regulated, constructed to energy standards and generally shouldn't present any perceived difference between those and site-built homes," Staudinger said. "However, there is also a stock of older

mobile homes that can often be very inefficient and are oftentimes made of inferior materials."

Staudinger said these older mobile homes pose the problems associated with the negative perceptions of manufactured housing today.

According to Staudinger, mobile homes built prior to 1978 were not built to code, which renders them expensive to heat and cool, and diminishes their durability.

"Encouraging the use of these as permanent housing may be, in the short run, affordable, because the price of entry is oftentimes low," Staudinger said. "They may cost a household, particularly a low-income household, a surprising percentage of the income to maintain."

According to Staudinger, the city of Asheville sees House Bill 769 as a chance to open up the rural communities of Buncombe County to a different way of housing.

"I think this is perceived as something that will open up the more rural areas of the county to a more diverse housing stock, particularly those areas of the county where there is zoning. A predominant part of Buncombe County is not zoned," Staudinger said. "I don't think this will have much of an effect on city lots."

Manufactured housing has a presence in Asheville, although it does not interfere with the downtown area. According to local mobile home lot owners, their current tenants are long-term residents of the rural communities of Buncombe County.

"We don't see a lot of transition here," said **William Carter, owner of Oteen Trailer Park in Asheville.** "All my tenants are very long-term. Some of them have been here for 30 to 40 years. We get a lot of these people that come when they're young, have kids, raise them and then go on to have their grandkids here, too."

According to Carter, the longevity of his tenants' residence results from the convenience of buying a mobile home and placing it on rented land, rather than renting on-site.

"All my tenants buy their own mobile homes and lease the land with me," Carter said. "It's the easiest way to do it."

**Donald Gray, co-consulting manager of the Rockwood Mobile Home Community in Asheville,** said his tenants find the convenience in mobile home living because it provides a cheap alternative to living near the city limits of Asheville.

"Some of our people do transition away from mobile home living, but the majority of them own their own mobile home and stay for a long time," Gray said. "Most of my people have been here for 10 years or more."

Ramsey's bill passed its first reading and will continue on the House of Representatives legislation track.