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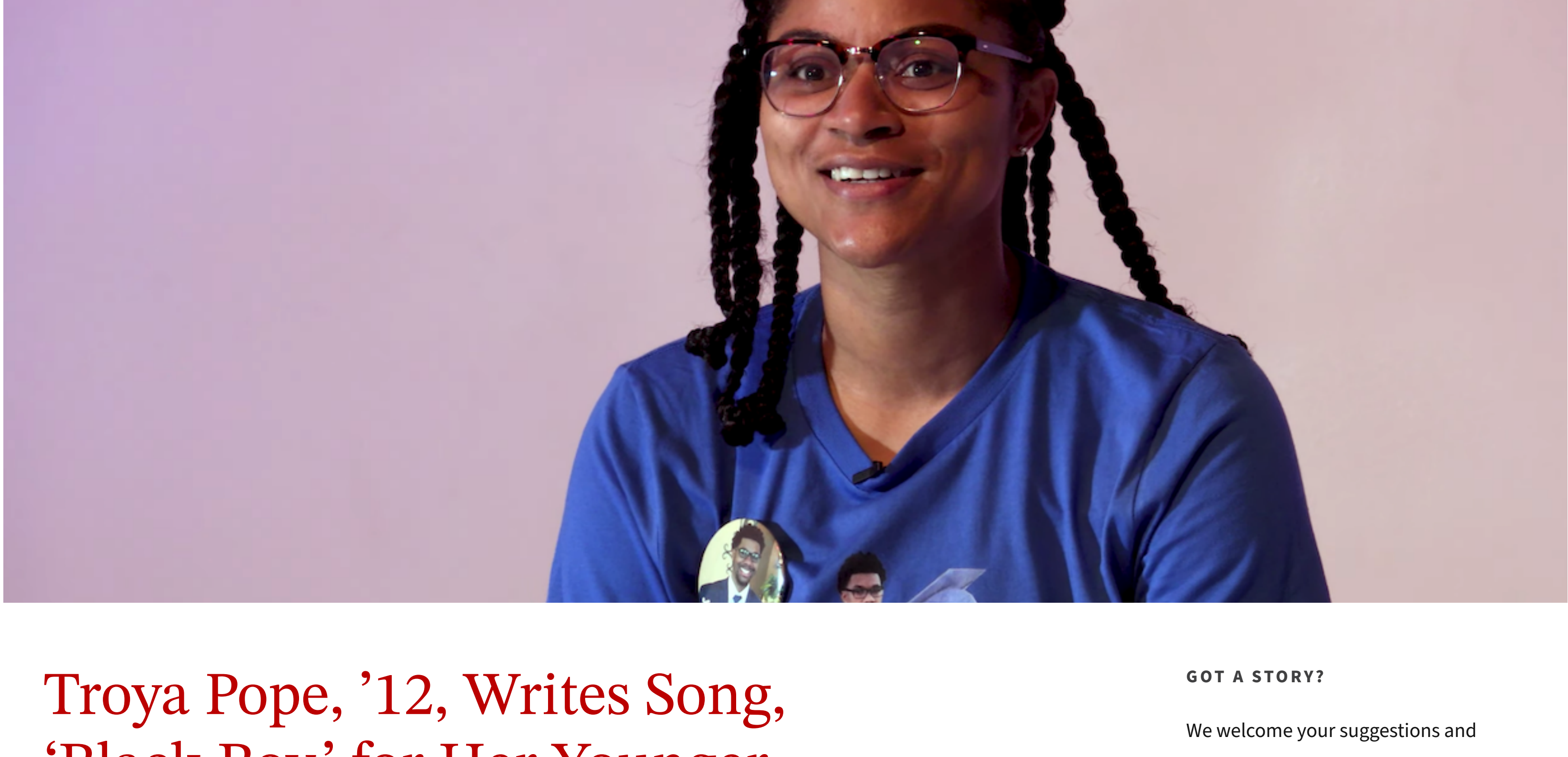
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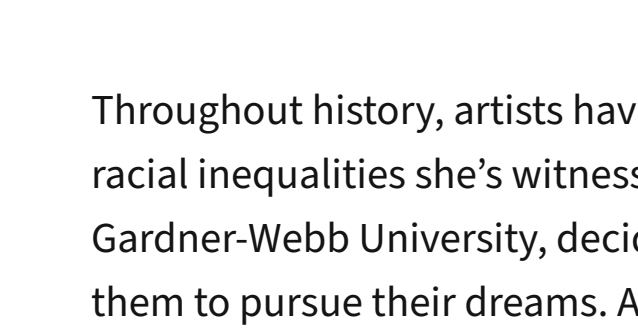
BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Gardner-Webb Alumna’s Hip-Hop Music Featured on N.C. Arts Council Program

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON FEBRUARY 5, 2021



Troya Pope, ’12, Writes Song, ‘Black Boy,’ for Her Younger Cousins



To our readers: In celebration of Black History Month during February, Gardner-Webb University will introduce you to alumni who are making a difference in the world around them. Through their jobs and creative passions, these alumni are inspiring others to achieve their dreams.

Throughout history, artists have used their music as a commentary on social issues. Affected by the racial inequalities she's witnessed close to home and on newsfeeds, Troya Pope, a 2012 alumna of Gardner-Webb University, decided to write a song to her younger cousins. She wants to encourage them to pursue their dreams. A newcomer among North Carolina's hip-hop artists, Pope's song, "Black Boy," caught the attention of Kyesha Jennings, an award-winning lecturer in English and a hip-hop scholar at N.C. State University.

Jennings interviewed Pope and other hip-hop artists for "[Mic Check: Culture, Power, and the Politics of N.C. Hip Hop](#)." The program was created for Come Hear NC and the N.C. Arts Council in partnership with The Black on Black Project, an organization that promotes conversations about identity and social justice.

Jennings referred to Pope as one of the most talented new hip-hop musicians in the state, and wrote in the introduction: "Her melodic voice and attention-grabbing flow offer an introspective look into relatable personal life struggles. Over the past year, as she found her voice in hip-hop, Troya began sharing narratives with social justice themes."



In the interview, Pope explains that although the song was released in 2020, it was written a year before. "It's crazy that it is so relevant right now," she said. "My little cousins are so into my music and that is what inspired me to keep pushing."

She takes her role as a mentor seriously. "At this point, it's not about me, it's about letting the youth know they can do anything or be anything," Pope affirmed. "I care. I'm here."

All of Pope's family appears in the video for "Black Boy," which tells the story of two boys who grow up in the same house and choose different paths. "The twist of the video is the one who chose the right path still gets killed by the police officer," Pope shared on the program. "Even if you're doing the right thing, crazy stuff can happen to you."

The song is also dedicated to Tyrique Hudson, a 22-year-old software engineer from Pope's hometown of Wilson, N.C., who was killed by his neighbor on [April 15, 2019](#), in Baltimore, Md. She didn't know Hudson, but his story resonated with her because at the time she was also living in Baltimore and said it was scary to walk down the street. "He was getting threats from one of his neighbors," Pope related. "He felt threatened and tried to get a peace order and was denied. He was killed by the neighbor. The system failed him. It could have been me."

Pope was recruited to play basketball at Gardner-Webb and was a member of the first women's team in GWU history to appear in the NCAA Basketball Tournament. Gardner-Webb played the Miami Hurricanes in the first round on March 20, 2011, and lost 80-62. In GWU's Division I history, Pope graduated second in career blocks, and she was the only GWU player to record over 100 career blocks and 100 career assists. This team also delivered the program's first-ever regular season conference championship (2009-10), posted an unprecedented 28 single season wins in 2009-10 and notched the program's 400th victory.

Being a part of the team and playing in the NCAA tournament was definitely the highlight of her GWU experience, but Pope also appreciated her coaches and professors. "The coaching staff at the time treated us as if we were all family, and I loved that I had a coach (Rick Reeves) who cared about me and my future," Pope said. "My plan was to be a biology major, because I wanted to be a dentist. Then, I was required to take a chemistry class, and I met Dr. (Venita) Totten. She made chemistry fun. She went the extra mile anytime I needed help and that convinced me to switch my major to chemistry."



Although Pope began rapping when she was 13, she didn't take it seriously, because sports consumed her time. At Gardner-Webb, her friend, Brandon Jackson, recorded her on some equipment he had. "It was not the best, but he worked with what he had," Pope reflected. "That helped keep my spark alive."

She was hired for a great job after college, but then she was laid off. "Blind-sided, I hit rock bottom and during that period, I started back creating music," Pope related. She went to Atlanta to find out more about the music business and stayed about a year.

When she came back to North Carolina, she found another job and began recording her music. "We all control our reality; we manifest what we want," Pope stated. "You control your story. Music always found its way back to me. It even waited for me to fulfill my dreams of playing collegiate Division I basketball, not to mention making history at the school. So if you don't listen to anything else I say ... Manifest the life you want. See it, breathe it, feel it, become it, and act as if it is so. We learn a lot of things in school, but that is the real key."

Pope is currently working at IVQIA, an international pharmaceutical and biotech company located in Durham, N.C. Her job is to assist with medical information for one of the COVID-19 vaccines.

Pope's new single, "Ain't Nowhere to Run," came out on Jan. 25. Additionally, a song she performed with Keya Smith, "Ready to Run," will be featured in a movie called "Freedom of NC," created by James Jones. The movie is set to come out on Juneteenth (June 19) 2021.

Find her music on Instagram: [troya.nc](#); YouTube and Facebook: Troya's Music Page; and on Apple Music, Tidal, iTunes, Spotify and streaming on other platforms.

GOT A STORY?

We welcome your suggestions and feedback, contact:

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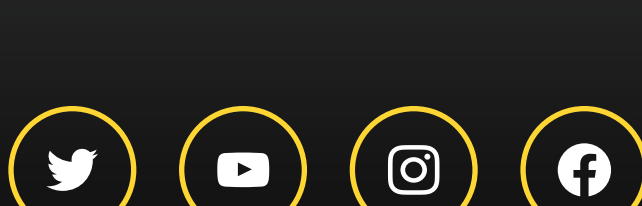
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