



Issue 5. April, May, June 2023

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a traditional Puerto Rican Vejigante mask. The mask is highly ornate, featuring a yellow face with green eye sockets and a wide, open mouth showing white teeth. It has several long, dark horns with yellow and green polka dots. The background is blurred, showing a red and white striped flag.

# National **Caribbean American Heritage** Puerto Rico Vejigantes

Together Venture Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is a quarterly digital newsletter that celebrates and honors historical moments, observed dates and events in an effort to educate, promote and strengthen diversity at Venture Community Services; Inc.

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Guest Photographer: Madeline Sepulveda: Vejigantes photos; page 16 - 19

Editor in Chief: Kimberly Hillier

Design: Antonio Fonseca

Venture Community Services,, Inc

1 Picker Rd.

Sturbridge, MA 01566

(508) 347-8181

<https://venturecs.org/>

“You don’t have true  
freedom until you allow  
a diversity of opinion  
and a diversity of voices.”

Don Lemon

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## COMMUNITY SERVICE MONTH

National Volunteer Month in April celebrates the impact volunteers have on our lives and encourages active volunteerism in generations to come. Most often unpaid, they generously donate a part of their lives to do the work that nobody else likes to do — cleaning up after the event, fostering shelter dogs, chaperoning field trips, or helping the librarian; there are so many areas requiring volunteers. This month, we salute them for their unwavering services to businesses and communities and hold aloft their examples to inspire young and adults towards volunteerism.

Volunteers are so special that they ought to be honored throughout the year, after every service that they volunteer to. National Volunteer Month is an extension to an already-established holiday-week, National Volunteer Week that was first held in 1943 in Canada. The week was dedicated to paying tribute to the unwavering contributions of women during World War II who would collect supplies and help the wounded soldiers. It was in the early 20th century that organized volunteering reached its peak. Numerous groups opened up to escalate humanitarian services, many of which are still active today such as the Red Cross.

Once the war was over, the celebrations were damped down but resurged in the early 1970s. National Volunteer Week debuted in 1974 in the United States and was revered by the general public. Since then, National Volunteer Week, which later went on to become National Volunteer Month, has been celebrated with zeal and enthusiasm every April. It was made official worldwide in 1990.

Presidents of the United States throughout the years have proclaimed National Volunteer Week and Month, saluting the unparalleled services of the volunteers who have given countless hours for the betterment of mankind, communities, and the American way of life.

### HOW TO OBSERVE NATIONAL VOLUNTEER MONTH

Volunteer at an organization:

Nonprofits receive an overwhelming number of requests in April, so if you can't get a spot in, don't push the idea away. Sign up for volunteering for some other month this year – but make sure you do volunteer!

Throw an appreciation volunteers' party:

They truly deserve the honor. Plan a party for all the volunteers you know at a wacky place, like a coffee shop, and bring in some surprises. Make sure your recognized volunteers don't even get up to get their drinks. Find volunteers to volunteer!

Celebrate it on social media:

Whether you are volunteering this month or remembering some great volunteers of the past (and present), share pictures and tell your story using the hashtag #NationalVolunteerMonth.



<https://nationaltoday.com/national-volunteer-month/>







## EARTH MONTH

Once again, it's that special time of the year! We can't wait for Earth Day 2023, which is just around the corner. Earth Day is a celebration of the earth and our environment. It is a historical event that takes place every year. On Earth Day, we will remember how closely we are connected to the earth, as well as our responsibility to protect it.

On this day, we come together to show our support for the planet and make pledges to do our part in protecting it. All of us can contribute to the environment by planting trees, cleaning up waste, and reducing our dependence on non-renewable resources like fossil fuels.

### WHEN IS EARTH DAY 2023?

The annual Earth Day event takes place on April 22 each year. This year, Earth Day is on Saturday, 22 April 2023. Participating in this global event raises awareness of the importance of protecting our planet and its natural resources. In addition, it encourages people to engage in conserving the environment. Rallies, concerts, and tree-planting activities are among the many activities and events that take place on Earth Day.

### BRIEF HISTORY OF EARTH DAY

The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970. The event was organized by Gaylord Nelson, a United States Senator from Wisconsin. He was inspired to action after witnessing the damage caused by an oil spill in Santa Barbara, California in the year 1969.

Gaylord Nelson realized that there was a need for humans to become more environmentally aware and active in preserving our planet. He hoped that Earth Day would be a way to educate people about the importance of environmental protection.

Earth Day quickly became a global phenomenon. More than 20 million people participated in the events across the United States on the first Earth Day. Today, Earth Day is celebrated in more than 193 countries around the world. At present, more than 1 billion people around the world take part in Earth Day.



On April 22, 2020, Earth Day celebrated its 50th anniversary. The event, however, was organized through digital platforms due to Covid-19.

The purpose of Earth Day is to bring awareness to the environmental issues our planet faces and to promote solutions for a sustainable future.

#### EARTH DAY 2023 THEME:

Following last year's successful campaign, global Earth Day organizer EarthDay.org (EDO), has announced the 2023 theme. The theme for Earth Day 2023 is "Invest in Our Planet."

Yes, it will be a continuation of the successful 2022 campaign. Once again, we must act boldly in order to achieve a successful outcome. We should innovate in a broader sense, and put our ideas into practice in an equitable manner.

<https://www.earthreminder.com/earth-day-2023-theme-date-events-celebrations/>

## **AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH: THE HISTORY AND TODAY**

### HOW HAS IT CHANGED?

Momentum around Autism Awareness month has increased with higher diagnosis rates, particularly evidenced by the more recent establishment of World Autism Awareness Day. This day helps to kick off a month of events and takes place on April 2nd every year, a date chosen by the United Nations General Assembly. This year will mark the tenth annual World Autism Awareness Day with the theme of "Toward Autonomy and Self-Determination."

### HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE

There are many ways to get involved with autism awareness month this year with your children, either in your child's school or your local community. Reach out to your local autism awareness organization to find out what events are ongoing that you can participate in. For some ideas on popular events each year, check out our list below. If your local group does not have any activities planned, create your own with your family, child's school, or the broader community.

### FUNDRAISERS AND WALKS

Many groups and organizations will choose to hold fundraisers throughout the month. If you're looking to participate in one with your child, research different options in your area to see what activities might be involved and where the money for each one goes before picking the best fit for your family. Awareness Walks are a fun, low key event to show support in groups while enjoying the spring weather.



## HANDS-ON AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Large organized group events may not always be the best fit for your family. Stages Learning offers a wide range of free resources, including fun activities that can be done in small groups inside the home or classroom. Puzzle pieces are a global symbol of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Pinterest has many puzzle themed crafts you can do with your child, such as decorating book-marks and picture frames with puzzle pieces or designs. Teachers may enjoy this Puzzle Piece Project and Autism Awareness Toolkit for using in the classroom with any grade level.

## BOOKS ABOUT AUTISM

Reading books with your child is a great way to start important discussions about support and awareness, especially if your child is still learning what it means to have autism. If you're looking for a good book to start with, check out Catlaina Vrana's review of her book "Ella Autie." "Ella Autie" follows a 4th grade student with autism through a day in her life.

## LIGHT IT UP BLUE

As part of Autism Speaks' Light it Up Blue campaign, wear blue on April 2 to show your support during Autism Awareness Day. Keep an eye out for local and global landmarks showing their support by changing their lighted colors to blue. Last year over 11,000 buildings joined the campaign, including the Empire State building in New York, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, and the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

## JOIN THE SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATION

Posting on Twitter and Facebook is an easy way to join the global dialogue. Share your support with your community and read your favorite tweets and posts with your child. Don't forget to tag @StagesLearning!

What are your favorite ways to spread awareness? Share with us in the comments!

## References:

WebMD Special Report: Autism - Searching for Answers

10 Years of Progress: What We've Learned About Autism

<https://blog.stageslearning.com/blog/autism-awareness-month-the-history-and-today#:~:text=Each%20year%20during%20the%20month,month%20in%20April%20of%201970.>







## CELEBRATE DIVERSITY MONTH

April is Diversity Month, a time to recognize and celebrate the beauty of our unique cultures, backgrounds, and traditions. Wellington is focusing on creating meaningful interaction, opportunity, and inclusion for all people. As a people, we are the intersectionality of race, ethnic origin and color, religion and creed, sexual orientation, age, ability, sizes, and shapes, to name but a few. We originate from a myriad of cultures, steeped in a multitude of belief systems and traditions.

It is important that we find value in each other's experiences, differences, and unique characteristics as it enables us to respond with relevance, empathy, and compassion. By celebrating and sharing our authentic selves, we gain a greater appreciation of each other and the diversity that surrounds us. Celebrating diversity not only boosts cultural awareness but most importantly creates spaces of inclusion and fosters belonging where people feel valued.

An appreciation and respect for differences can make the world a better place for everyone.

<https://www.wellingtonfl.gov/906/Celebrate-Diversity-Month#:~:text=April%20is%20Diversity%20Month%2C%20a,cultures%2C%20backgrounds%2C%20and%20traditions.>

### HERE ARE FOUR OF OUR FAVORITE WAYS TO CELEBRATE DIVERSITY MONTH:

1. Host a multicultural movie night. Invite friends, family or colleagues over to watch some multicultural and foreign films. You can even ask guests to bring a snack to represent a different country or culture to munch on.
2. Attend a cultural art exhibit. Many cities are home to international or cultural art exhibits. Visit a nearby museum for a weekend outing and learn more about other cultures through the lens of fine and contemporary art.
3. Play music from around the world. Throughout the month, play music from around the world in your office, classroom, car, or home. Celebrate the diversity of your employees, coworkers or students by asking them to bring in examples of music from their own culture or heritage.
4. Support minority-owned businesses. Visit a minority-owned business or utilize services from a minority vendor to show your support for their establishment.

<https://awards4u.com/blog/4-ways-celebrate-diversity-month>



# MAY

## HAITIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Haitian Heritage Month is observed in May 2023. Haitian Heritage Month is a celebration in the United States of Haitian heritage and culture. It was first celebrated in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1998.

Haiti, officially the Republic of Haiti is a Caribbean country. It occupies the western, smaller portion of the island of Hispaniola, in the Greater Antillean archipelago, which it shares with the Dominican Republic.

The Haitian Heritage Month celebration is an expansion of the Haitian Flag Day, a major patriotic day celebration in Haiti and the Diaspora. Haitian President Dumarsais Estimé started the Flag Day celebration with parades, cultural and athletic events in many cities in Haiti in the 1930s, when he was minister of education under President Sténio Vincent.

<https://www.cute-calendar.com/event/haitian-heritage-month/41129.html>









## JEWISH-AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Stories of triumph and bravery always get us in the mood for celebrations, and this Jewish American Heritage Month in May is no different. From contributing important scientific discoveries to raising the flag for the abused and neglected, the Jewish population has had a huge role to play in where America stands today on the world stage. The more than 350-year history has given us names like Albert Einstein and Ruth Bader Ginsburg — both of whom fought through hard times to emerge victoriously. In order to honor the Jewish communities' continued achievements, May was declared as Jewish American Heritage Month by former president George W. Bush back in 2006.

### HISTORY OF JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Jews first arrived on American soil back in 1654 in New Amsterdam. In search of better opportunities and lifestyles, they made the U.S. their new home base, finding in it a space where they could openly practice their faith and lead their lives freely without the fear of persecution. The efforts to create a Jewish American Heritage Month had been in the pipeline since 1980. The U.S. Congress passed and authorized a bill that would allow President Carter to designate a special week in either April or May for Jewish heritage celebrations. Finally, in April of 2006, the whole month of May was dedicated to recognizing and honoring Jewish contributions and achievements.

Albert Einstein and Ruth Bader Ginsburg are some of the most prominent Jewish American figures. Einstein faced ridicule and bullying growing up with many of his teachers giving up on him. If he had succumbed to society's ugliness, we, as human beings, might have missed out on a lot of great things today. Likewise, Ginsburg faced sexism at her workplace. People did not want to work with her just because she was a woman and many still believed that a woman's place was in the kitchen. However, she pushed on and became the harbinger of many helpful laws, including abortion rights.

Jewish people have also been great advocates for other minorities and their rights in America. They participated in the Civil Rights Movement, having showed up at voter registrations, rallies, sit-ins, e.t.c. All the achievements by Jewish people, big and small, deserve to be recognized and celebrated — and there's no better time than in Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM).



<https://nationaltoday.com/jewish-american-heritage-month/>

## MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

Mental health is wealth, especially during Mental Health Awareness Month, which is celebrated in May. The stigma around mental health and treatment has long existed, even though this has started to change. Still, people hesitate to seek help or even talk about it with their loved ones for fear of being judged and facing unnecessary backlash. Simple logic dictates that if we are hurt anywhere, we must seek treatment to get better. This applies to both our mental- and physical well-being. While Mental Health Awareness Month is celebrated in the U.S., a more universal day is also celebrated by the WHO on October 10, and it is known as World Mental Health Day.

## HISTORY OF MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

Mental Health Awareness Month was first celebrated in 1949. It was commemorated by the Mental Health America organization, which was then known as the National Committee for Mental Hygiene and then later as the National Mental Health Association before it got its current name. The association was founded by Clifford Whittingham Beers. Beers, who was born in 1876 in Connecticut, was one of five children in his family who all suffered from mental illness and psychological distress. All of them also went on to spend time at mental institutions and it was from his hospital admittance that he discovered that the mental health field had a notorious reputation for malpractice, maltreatment, and immense bias.

Beers went on to author “A Mind That Found Itself”, which is a bestseller even today. Gaining popularity and support from medical professionals, Beers founded the National Committee for Mental Hygiene. Beers and his colleagues at the association wanted to find ways to make sure that mental health patients not only received the right care but also did not feel alone in their fight against mental diseases.

Since 1949, each year, a theme is selected to be highlighted and celebrated throughout May. Recent years have seen themes like ‘Do More for 1 in 4’ (2011), ‘B4Stage4’ (2015), and ‘Nature’ (2021). During the month, various events are held that are covered by media and well-known figures like politicians and actors. Mental Health America also diligently releases a mental health toolkit for outreach activities.

<https://nationaltoday.com/mental-health-awareness-month/>



## SPEECH AND HEARING AWARENESS MONTH

CDC supports Better Hearing and Speech Month (BHSM), founded in 1927 by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Each May, this annual event provides an opportunity to raise awareness about hearing and speech problems, and to encourage people to think about their own hearing and get their hearing checked.

Early identification and intervention for hearing loss is important. Many people live with unidentified hearing loss, often failing to realize that they are missing certain sounds and words. Checking one's hearing is the first step toward addressing the issue.

According to the World Health Organization's first World Report on Hearing:

- Noise is now being acknowledged as an important public health issue and a top environmental risk faced by the world today.
- Over 50% of people aged 12–35 years listen to music via personal audio devices at volumes that pose a risk to their hearing.
- A rule of the thumb for staying safe is to keep the volume below 60%.
- If you frequently use personal audio devices around loud sounds: instead of turning the volume up, consider using noise cancelling earphones or headphones.
- Listening through personal audio devices should not exceed 80 dB (adults) or 75 dB (sensitive users: e.g., children) for 40 hours a week.
- Listeners who regularly use portable audio devices can expose themselves to the same level of sound in 15 minutes of music at 100 dB that an industrial worker would receive in an 8-hour day at 85 dB.

### How to protect yourself

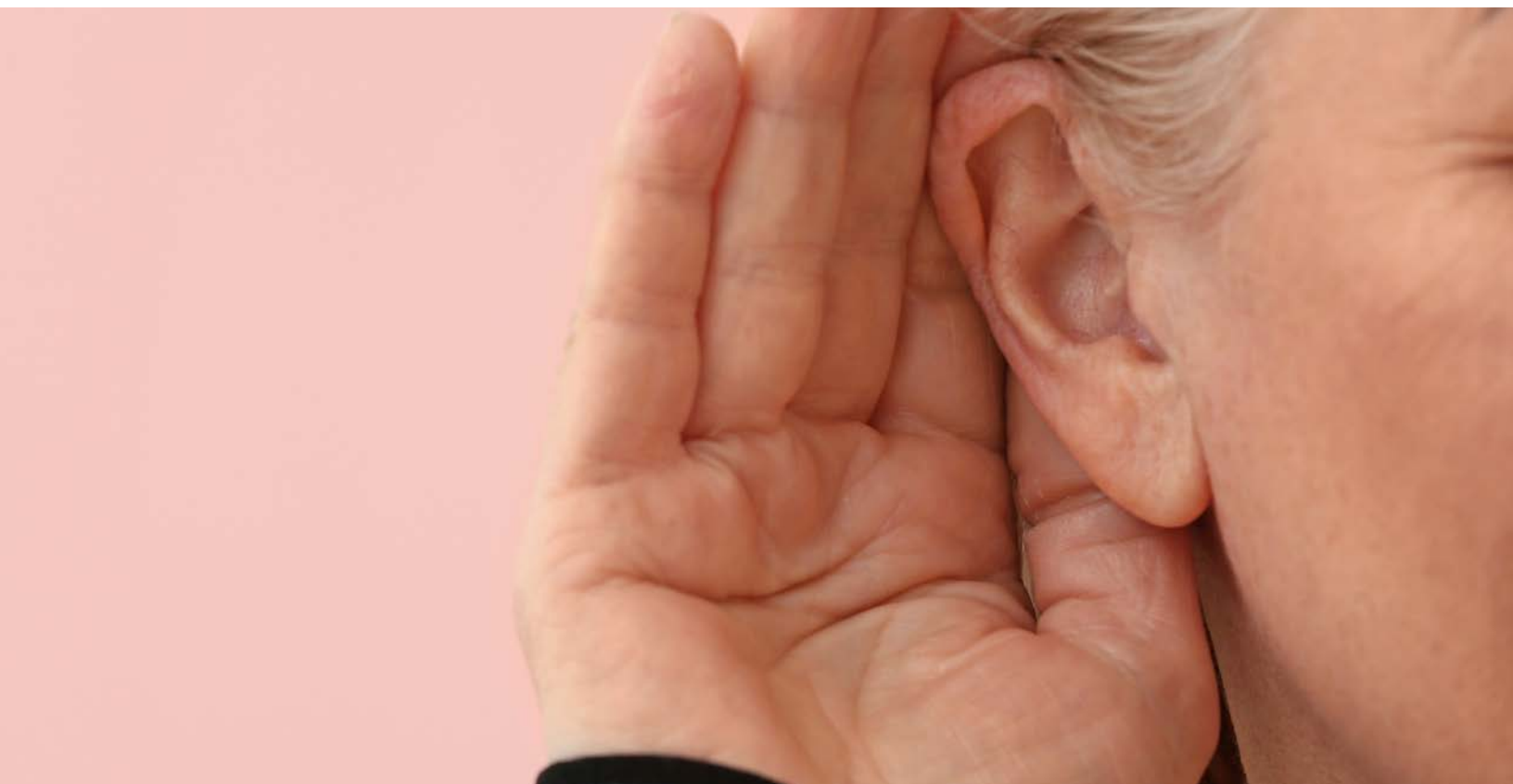
People often voluntarily expose themselves to loud sounds through their headphones or through the stereo system in concerts, night-clubs, sporting events, and even fitness classes.

- Protect your hearing when shooting a firearm. Those using firearms for recreational purpose would benefit from learning about their safe use, which includes but is not limited to use of hearing protection.
- Is the noise too loud? If you need to shout to make yourself heard, then yes. And you need hearing protection such as earplugs or noise-cancelling earmuffs.
- Do not listen to headphones for a long time. Turn the volume down and take periodic breaks from the noise.

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncch/features/better-hearing-and-speech-month/index.html>







MAY

## TIME OF REMEMBRANCE AND RECONCILIATION FOR THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES DURING WWII

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The Time of Remembrance and Reconciliation for those who Lost their Lives during WWII takes place on May 8 and 9. It is a time in which the nation, and the world, take a step back, and remember the tragic past, and all the lives lost, so that we as a society can build a more communal and tolerant world. Not many people know that the Holocaust was just one of the many elements that made up the Second World War, with millions of innocent civilians killed in and out of war. We're giving you everything you need to know.

### HISTORY OF TIME OF REMEMBRANCE AND RECONCILIATION FOR THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES DURING WWII

History forms a vital part of our society as it can influence how we live, how we see people, experience politics and entertainment, and even what we choose to do with our lives. One event in history brought so much pain and devastation that it is often difficult to look back at it, but we choose to do that so we can face the past and work on being better humans in our daily lives and as we head into the future. That event is the Second World War.

It began in Europe on September 1, 1939, with the German invasion of Poland and the United Kingdom and France declaring war on Germany two days later. It saw the vast majority of the world's countries, including all of its great powers, form two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis powers. They threw their entire economic, industrial, and scientific capabilities behind their war efforts, blurring the distinction between civilian and military resources. Today, the war is considered by many the bloodiest conflict in human history, resulting in approximately 85 million deaths, the vast majority of whom were civilians. But that wasn't solely a result of war and battle; genocides like the Holocaust, starvation, massacres, and disease killed tens of millions of people.

On November 22, 2004, the U.N. General Assembly declared May 8 and 9 a Time of Remembrance and Reconciliation for those who Lost their Lives during WWII inviting all member states, organizations of the United Nations System, non-governmental organizations, and individuals to observe either one or both of these days appropriately to pay tribute to all victims of the Second World War. The Assembly emphasized that this historic event established the conditions for the creation of the United Nations, designed to save future generations from the scourge of war. It begins on May 8, which is the anniversary of the date the Second World War allies accepted Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender.

<https://nationaltoday.com/time-of-remembrance-and-reconciliation-for-those-who-lost-their-lives-during-wwii/#:~:text=Historical-,Time%20of%20Remembrance%20and%20Reconciliation%20for%20those%20who%20Lost,during%20WWII%20%E2%80%93%20May%208%2C%202023&text=The%20Time%20of%20Remembrance%20and,on%20>

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## WORLD DAY FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY FOR DIALOGUE AND DEVELOPMENT

MAY

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PROTECTING THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Held every year on 21 May, UNESCO leads the celebration of World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development highlighting not only the richness of the world's cultures, but also the essential role of intercultural dialogue for achieving peace and sustainable development.

The pandemic has proven the intrinsic value of the cultural and creative sector at generating social cohesion, educational resource or personal well-being in times of crisis. It has also undermined the sector's potential to generate economic growth, something which is too often underestimated. The cultural sector accounts for 3.1% of global GDP and 6.2% of all employment.

### CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

With the adoption in September 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations, and the resolution on Culture and Sustainable Development adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2015, the message of the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development is more important than ever. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can best be achieved by drawing upon the creative potential of the world's diverse cultures and engaging in continuous dialogue to ensure that all members of society benefit from sustainable development.

### WHY DOES CULTURAL DIVERSITY MATTER?

Three-quarters of the world's major conflicts have a cultural dimension. Bridging the gap between cultures is urgent and necessary for peace, stability and development.

Cultural diversity is a driving force of development, not only with respect to economic growth, but also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life. This is captured in the culture conventions, which provide a solid basis for the promotion of cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is thus an asset that is indispensable for poverty reduction and the achievement of sustainable development.

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At the same time, acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity – in particular through innovative use of media and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) – are conducive to dialogue among civilizations and cultures, respect and mutual understanding.

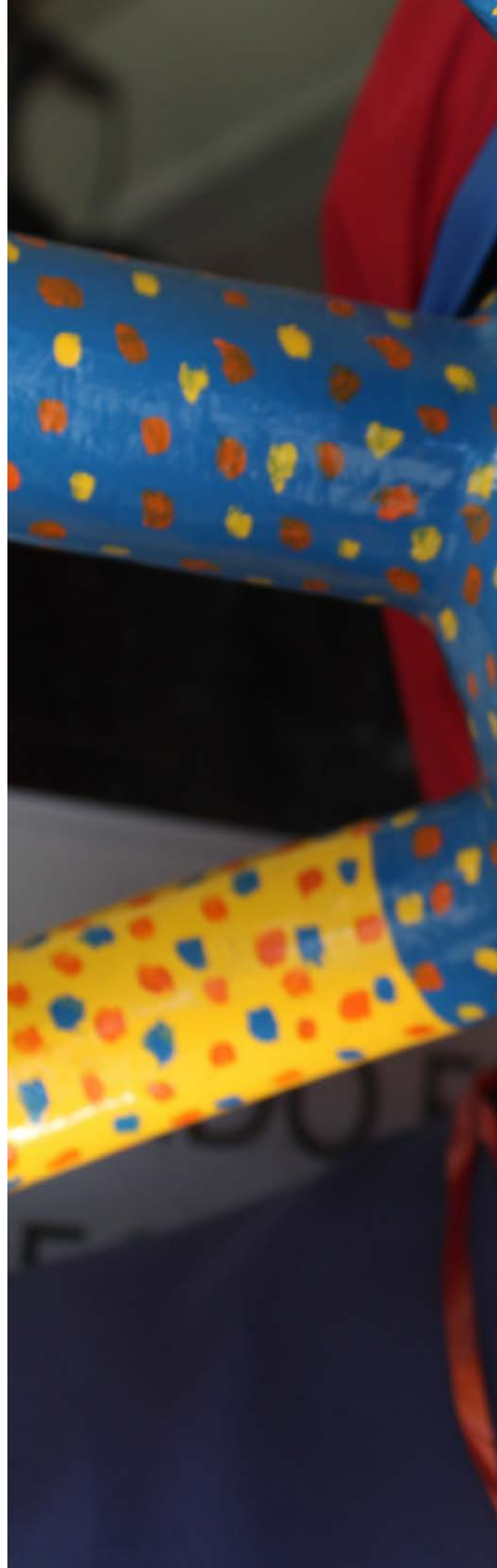
## ORIGIN AND PURPOSE

In 2001, UNESCO adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Next, in December 2002, the UN General Assembly, in its resolution 57/249, declared May 21 to be the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, and in 2015, the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the resolution on Culture and Sustainable Development A/C.2/70/L.59, affirming culture's contribution to the three dimensions of sustainable development, acknowledging further the natural and cultural diversity of the world, and recognizing that cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development.

The day provides us with an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the values of cultural diversity and to advance the four goals of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions adopted on 20 October 2005:

Support sustainable systems of governance for culture  
Achieve a balanced flow of cultural goods and services and increase mobility of artists and cultural professionals  
Integrate culture in sustainable development frameworks  
Promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/cultural-diversity-day#:~:text=Held%20every%20year%20on%2021,achieving%20peace%20and%20sustainable%20development.>





## MASKED ENIGMAS

### THE VEJIGANTE OF THE FIESTAS OF SANTIAGO APÓSTOL IN LOÍZA, PUERTO RICO

by Lowell Fiet | Mar 16, 2014

The brilliantly colored and captivatingly grotesque mask of the Vejigante remains enigmatic. The name derives from the Spanish vejiga or bladder. Cervantes in *Don Quixote* describes costumed mummers—“bojiganga”—who use inflated “vejigas” on sticks as weapons to mock and chastise onlookers. The word vejigante entered the Puerto Rican lexicon by 1747. But neither reference specifically addresses the masked and horned character central to the African-Puerto Rican celebration and ritual. It is as much trickster-devil (or diablito) as sacred presence, as much dumb-show clown as sage, as much sensualist as shaman, as much a mythical and dynamic anthropomorphic face that scares children as a source of energy, strength and courage. With slightly different names, costumes, and masks, Vejigantes appear as devil-heroes of cultural performance throughout the Hispanic Caribbean and littoral Central and South America.

Two variations exist in Puerto Rico: the Vejigante of pre-Lenten Carnival in Ponce, on the south coast, with its paper-maché mask, and the Vejigante of the Fiestas of Santiago Apóstol (St. James) in Loíza, on the northeast coast, with its mask carved from coconut husks. The colorful billowy costumes used by both appear nearly identical, but the masks reflect different materials, modes of production, and historiographies. Studies ascribe African and European elements to both. The use of paper-maché and its molding on fixed forms (similar to European carnival and commedia dell'arte masks) facilitate the plasticity of the ornate horns, pikes, and crests of the Ponce version and suggest a stronger Spanish precedence. The carving of the features of the Loíza masks in hard but porous coconut husks suggests a heritage more linked to the carved wooden masks of West Africa. I will here concentrate on Loíza's tradition because of that heritage, the elaborate narrative structure of the Fiestas, and the centrality of the role of the Vejigante.

Loíza's African-Puerto Rican population base and the Fiestas of Santiago Apóstol, celebrated annually from July 25 to 28, make that locality the seat of African cultural influence in Puerto Rico. July 25 is Santiago's saint day, often celebrated with a parade of floats and a bandstand for local music in the town plaza. However, the processions of the three effigies—Santiago of the Men (July 26), Santiago of the Women (July 27) and “Santiaguito” or Santiago of the Children (July 28)—are the *raison d'être* of the Fiestas. Each procession travels east from the town plaza in the afternoon, with devotees carrying the saints on their shoulders on Route 187 for nearly three miles to the neighborhood of Las Carreras.

It was there, the legend says, that fishermen found the carved wooden image of Santiago Apóstol (now Santiago of the Children) under a cork tree. They took the little saint to the town's Spanish church, but during the night it miraculously escaped to return to the spot where it was found. The miracle was repeated on the two subsequent nights. By refusing to stay in the official church, the image became the people's saint, and the three effigies of the saint stay in the community with *mantenedores* or keepers responsible for their care and upkeep.



The date usually cited for the discovery is around 1830, although the celebration of other saints could have preceded that. Saint's day processions were common in Puerto Rico from the 16th century onward. The community of Loíza formed very early in the process of colonization, and its Church of the Holy Spirit and St. Patrick, built in 1645, is one of the oldest on the island. Landowners (and possibly slaveholders) of Irish descent presumably influenced the choice of St. Patrick as the official patron saint.

The warrior St. James is the patron saint of Spain, credited with appearing miraculously to help drive the Moors from the Iberian peninsula; in his representations a Moor's head and dark face lie under the hooves of his horse. The saint's appearance in Loíza in the early 19th century could thus relate to Catholic evangelism and efforts to convert and control the non-Spanish-speaking Africans who arrived in Puerto Rico from other Caribbean islands late in the 18th century or directly from Africa in the first decades of the 19th.

Regardless of whether the "miracle" served as strategic proselytizing or arose as an ingenious act of resistance by the free and/or enslaved African-Puerto Rican population, the saint's popularity and the enthusiasm with which he was celebrated resulted in the addition of the two other plaster statuettes, each slightly larger than the original and each with a separate procession and celebration day. What began with one saint and probably one festival day of reduced labor and community interaction transformed itself, through devotional energy and over time, into three saints, three processions, and four days of worship and celebration.

Devotees carry the saints on litters, while in front of them devilish Vejigantes, fancy-dressed Spaniards or Caballeros, cross-dressed Locas with padded bosoms and buttocks and faces blackened with shoe polish, and tattered Viejos or Old Men, jump, dance and celebrate. The Carretón Alegre ("waggon of joy"), a sound system and mini-information center pulled by bicycle, pulses with recorded Caribbean music such as salsa, reggae, zouk, merengue, reguetón, calypso and soca. The municipal band plays traditional danzas from the platform of a roofed truck that follows the saint. Each procession arrives at the point where the cork tree of the founding legend once stood. A mosaic sculpture created by Loíza artist Daniel Lind-Ramos marks the location. The procession waits there until riders on horseback carry the flags of Santiago the roughly quarter mile back to route 187 and return. The saint and its retinue then begin to retrace their steps but quickly disperse in the music, dancing, food, and drink of celebration that lasts into the night.





On July 26, Santiago of the Men starts out in the church of the Holy Spirit and St. Patrick. The two other saints join him on the road, and all three reach Las Carreras. The following day, Santiago of the Women leaves just off the town plaza, salutes the other two saints near the houses of their mantenedores, but only Santiago of the Children continues with it to Las Carreras. On July 28, the road is reserved for “Santiaguito.” The effigy spends the night in the modern church built in his honor on Route 187 near the entrance to Las Carreras. In the morning devotees transport the saint to the plaza to celebrate with local children. At 3:30 or 4 p.m. the journey begins past the neighborhoods that line Route 187. The other statuettes salute but do not join the saint as it moves toward the point of its discovery.

The sacred and profane nature of the Fiestas fully reveals itself in the last procession. The medieval Christian strand of the litany of saints’ day parades and Cervantes’ bawdy *bojiganga* intertwines with the profound religiosity and sensuous celebratory strand of African masquerade. The movement through blazing summer heat, ear-pounding rockets that announce the saint’s arrival, music old and new, a squadron of heavily armed police, dozens of bicycles, the horns and exhaust of backed-up traffic, riders on horseback, and the memory of violence that hangs over the route—all come together to create a transversal moment of freedom and communion.

In the 1950s, Puerto Rican archaeologist Ricardo Alegría explained the Fiestas in terms of Yoruban art and ritual practice. He saw in the image of Santiago Apóstol a suggestion of carved African effigies of Shangó, god of war, fire, thunder and lightning. More recent research finds the connection unlikely: virtually no evidence of Yoruban influence surfaces during the first three centuries of colonization, and shipping manifests record that most Africans reaching Puerto Rico in the first half of the 19th century were Congo-Bantú brought on Spanish ships that slipped through the British embargo of the slave trade. However, regardless of the origin of the African-Puerto Rican population of the Loíza region, two different cultural-religious forms and practices coincided, each complementing and facilitating the development of the other, and ultimately coming to share aesthetic and spiritual elements. The impassioned worship of the Spanish Catholic saint opened the door for the reinvention of African traditions of masquerade in the characters of the *Vejigante*, *Caballero*, *Loca* and *Viejo*.

The *Vejigante* remains the most iconic and dynamic of these characters. As the African-inspired trickster-diablo and the protagonist of African-Puerto Rican culture, it evokes the *egungun* quality of calling forth the ancestors and allowing them to return, if only briefly, to enjoy life and communicate through the bodies of the living. Whether one views that function as metaphorical or

real, the mythical, otherworldly, and beast-like anthropomorphic mask preserves and reconstitutes the partially erased, broken, or submerged memory of an African past that reappears in the present.

The cultural performance of the Vejigante finds its parallel in the functions of the music, dancing and lyrics of Puerto Rican bomba, the African-inspired percussion of barrel-shaped drums with choreography that creates a dialogue between the rhythm of the drum and the body of the dancer. Current practice relegates bomba to the bandstand in the town's plaza or to the yard of mask-making Ayala family, which the processions pass on their way to Las Carreras. However, stories circulate a memory in which bomba drummers waited at the base of the cork tree and greeted the returning saint and revelers with drumming that symbolically recreated an African homeland.

The density and specificities of the performance, its urgency and vitality, the high level of community participation and the uncontainable impulse to share and transform traditions create an act of cultural resistance and affirmation. Actors and spectators intermingle in the same space, and a multitude of onlookers waits for and then joins the processions as active participants. What begins in the town plaza with a handful of devotees and festive characters multiplies exponentially during the course of the action.

This takes place inside a broader global environment that tends to negate memory, manual arts and crafts, local knowledge and beliefs, and non-media events. The processions traverse Loíza, one of Puerto Rico's poorest municipalities. The high under- and unemployment levels, drug trafficking, related gang and turf-war clashes, government and private development schemes, and violent confrontations with police scar the social fabric and undermine its natural tropical beauty. For a sad example, Carlos Ayala Calcaño, one of Loíza's most talented festival artists, was killed in February 2011 as the "collateral damage" of a drive-by shooting on the same Route 187 where he danced every July as a brilliantly ecstatic Vejigante.

The artist Castor Ayala solidified the classical mask style in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. His son Raúl (the most prominent artist of masks and the leader of the Los Hermanos Ayala bomba group) preserves that style while also inventing elaborate new styles. Other prominent mask artists such as Pedro Laviera and Carlos Ayala Calcaño have added even greater plasticity to the coconut husk form. The focus on Vejigantes takes on particular significance because of the surge in participation of a new generation of performers that includes children, young adults, and, virtually unheard of previously, women. In the past five years a more individual and expressive aesthetic reflects the individual performer playing a greater role in the creation of his/her mask. Multiple variations emerge in the carving, painting and coloration, shape of tongues and eyes, and costume design. The new masks are more daringly seductive and sensual as the number of Vejigantes multiplies.

Camera in hand, I march among the saints, Vejigantes, Caballeros, Locas, and Viejos every July. I've done it without fail for the past eighteen years. In 2007, I published a book on the Fiestas, and my work with local artists continues as I prepare a broader study on Caribbean masks and mask-makers. Although I attend other festivals and study many masks, the enigmatic Vejigante of Loíza continues to amaze me as a mirror that probes my own enigmas.

Lowell Fiet teaches Caribbean drama and performance at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. He is the author of *Caballeros, Vejigantes, Locas y Viejos: Santiago Apóstol y los performereros afro-puertorriqueños* (Teranova Editores, 2007).

<https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/masked-enigmas/>



## LGBTQIA+? Pride Month

Pride Month is celebrated every June as a tribute to those who were involved in the Stonewall Riots. We're getting ready to dust off our rainbow flags, douse ourselves in glitter, and go join in the fun. With parades, festivals, and concerts going on across the globe, there's always some way for you to get involved — as well as learn some important social history along the way.

As a sub-holiday during Pride Month, Pride Day is celebrated on June 28. The day marks the date in history when the first pride march was held in New York City in 1970. However, different communities celebrate Pride Day on different days throughout June.

### HISTORY OF PRIDE MONTH

On a hot summer's night in New York on June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay club in Greenwich Village, which resulted in bar patrons, staff, and neighborhood residents rioting onto Christopher Street outside. Among the many leaders of the riots was a black, trans, bisexual woman, Marsha P. Johnson, leading the movement to continue over six days with protests and clashes. The message was clear — protestors demanded the establishment of places where LGBT+ people could go and be open about their sexual orientation without fear of arrest.

Pride Month is largely credited as being started by bisexual activist Brenda Howard. Known as 'The Mother of Pride,' Brenda organized Gay Pride Week and the Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade a year after the Stonewall Riots. This eventually morphed into what we now know as the New York City Pride March and was the catalyst for the formation of similar parades and marches across the world.

Speaking of the rainbow flag, it was actually gay politician Harvey Milk who asked a talented designer friend, Gilbert Baker, to design an all-encompassing symbol to take to San Francisco's Pride March in 1978. Sadly, Harvey Milk was assassinated along with Mayor George Moscone on November 23, 1978, in San Francisco City Hall by Dan White, a disgruntled former supervisor who was





angry at Milk for lobbying against having him reappointed on the Board of Supervisors.

Bill Clinton was the first U.S. President to officially recognize Pride Month in 1999 and 2000. Then, from 2009 to 2016, Barack Obama declared June LGBT Pride Month. In May 2019, Donald Trump recognized Pride Month with a tweet announcing that his administration had launched a global campaign to decriminalize homosexuality, although critics have noted that actions speak louder than words.

The New York Pride Parade is one of the largest and most well-known parades to take place, with over 2 million people estimated to have taken part in 2019.

<https://nationaltoday.com/pride-month/>

## **BLACK MUSIC MONTH**

African American Appreciation Month is celebrated annually in June. It's a month for all of us to celebrate the contribution of African Americans to art, culture, and society today. Specifically, we recognize the inspirational music composed, arranged, and performed by African American artists.

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter declared June as Black Music Month. In line with this, President Barack Obama continues the spirit of acknowledgment and proclaims the start of summer as African-American Music Appreciation Month. He openly mentioned that African American music represents "the creative spirit at the heart of American identity"

## **HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN APPRECIATION MONTH**

This holiday began in 1979 when then-President Jimmy Carter announced that henceforth, June was to be recognized as Black Music Month. He proclaimed this to cultivate appreciation and promote awareness about the uniqueness and various styles of the music contributed by African-American artists, be it jazz, gospel, blues, hip hop, rap, or rock and roll. Since then, every June has been observed by Americans across the world to celebrate the music that is listened to, loved, and appreciated by many different generations.

Many artists like Kenny Gamble, Dyana Williams, and Ed Wright made their own efforts to continue the tradition. They were supported by many other artists who wanted to share their talent with the rest of the music industry. The first noticeable music genre of African-American origin is the blues, rooted in African religious songs sung during slavery. When jazz came about in the 1920s, it bridged racial gaps as folks of different nationalities came together to enjoy this distinguished form of music. Soon after came different genres such as rock, swing, gospel, hip hop, funk, Motown, and even boogie-woogie. Many famous artists such as the Rolling Stones and The Beatles credit their music to the influence of the blues and jazz. African Americans continue to take the stage and showcase their talent through the performance of their soulful music. These include pop divas like Whitney Houston, Alicia Keys, Aretha Franklin, and Beyonce. These artists are renowned throughout the world.

<https://nationaltoday.com/african-american-appreciation-month/>



LGBTQIA+? Pride Month is currently celebrated each year in the month of June to honor the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in Manhattan. The Stonewall Uprising was a tipping point for the Gay Liberation Movement in the United States. In the United States the last Sunday in June was initially celebrated as “Gay Pride Day,” but the actual day was flexible. In major cities across the nation the “day” soon grew to encompass a month-long series of events. Today, celebrations include pride parades, picnics, parties, workshops, symposia and concerts, and LGBTQ Pride Month events attract millions of participants around the world. Memorials are held during this month for those members of the community who have been lost to hate crimes or HIV/AIDS. The purpose of the commemorative month is to recognize the impact that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals have had on history locally, nationally, and internationally.

In 1994, a coalition of education-based organizations in the United States designated October as LGBT History Month. In 1995, a resolution passed by the General Assembly of the National Education Association included LGBT History Month within a list of commemorative months. National Coming Out Day (October 11), as well as the first “March on Washington” in 1979, are commemorated in the LGBTQ community during LGBT History Month.

#### ANNUAL LGBTQ+ PRIDE TRADITIONS

The first Pride march in New York City was held on June 28, 1970, on the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. Primary sources available at the Library of Congress provide detailed information about how this first Pride march was planned and the reasons why activists felt so strongly that it should exist. Looking through the Lili Vincenz and Frank Kameny Papers in the Library’s Manuscript Division, researchers can find planning documents, correspondence, flyers, ephemera and more from the first Pride marches in 1970. This, the first U.S. Gay Pride Week and March, was meant to give the community a chance to gather together to “...commemorate the Christopher Street Uprisings of last summer in which thousands of homosexuals went to the streets to demonstrate against centuries of abuse ... from government hostility to employment and housing discrimination, Mafia control of Gay bars, and anti-Homosexual laws” (Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee Fliers, Franklin Kameny Papers). The concept behind the initial Pride march came from members of the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations (ERCHO), who had been organizing an annual July 4th demonstration (1965-1969) known as the “Reminder Day Pickets,” at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. At the ERCHO Conference in November 1969, the 13 homophile organizations in attendance voted to pass a resolution to organize a national annual demonstration, to be called Christopher Street Liberation Day.

As members of the Mattachine Society of Washington, Frank Kameny and Lilli Vincenz participated in the discussion, planning, and promotion of the first Pride along with activists in New York City and other homophile groups belonging to ERCHO.

By all estimates, there were three to five thousand marchers at the inaugural Pride in New York City, and today marchers in New York City number in the millions. Since 1970, LGBTQIA+? people have continued to gather together in June to march with Pride and demonstrate for equal rights.



## WHAT IS JUNETEENTH?

Juneteenth commemorates an effective end of slavery in the United States.

Juneteenth (short for “June Nineteenth”) marks the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas in 1865 to take control of the state and ensure that all enslaved people be freed. The troops’ arrival came a full two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth honors the end to slavery in the United States and is considered the longest-running African American holiday. On June 17, 2021, it officially became a federal holiday.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House two months earlier in Virginia, but slavery had remained relatively unaffected in Texas—until U.S. General Gordon Granger stood on Texas soil and read General Orders No. 3: “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.”

## THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

The Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, had established that all enslaved people in Confederate states in rebellion against the Union “shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”

But in reality, the Emancipation Proclamation didn’t instantly free any enslaved people. The proclamation only applied to places under Confederate control and not to slave-holding border states or rebel areas already under Union control. However, as Northern troops advanced into the Confederate South, many enslaved people fled behind Union lines.

## JUNETEENTH AND SLAVERY IN TEXAS

In Texas, slavery had continued as the state experienced no large-scale fighting or significant presence of Union troops. Many enslavers from outside the Lone Star State had moved there, as they viewed it as a safe haven for slavery.

After the war came to a close in the spring of 1865, General Granger’s arrival in Galveston that June signaled freedom for Texas’s 250,000 enslaved people. Although emancipation didn’t happen overnight for everyone—in some cases, enslavers withheld the information until after harvest season—celebrations broke out among newly freed Black people, and Juneteenth was born. That December, slavery in America was formally abolished with the adoption of the 13th Amendment.

<https://www.history.com/news/what-is-juneteenth>

## MAMA'S PUERTO RICAN CHICKEN AND RICE (ARROZ CON POLLO)

My mama's famous Puerto Rican chicken and rice, also known as arroz con pollo, is made in one pan with homemade adobo seasoned chicken sofrito and savory rice. This comforting dish is easy to make and the perfect nourishing weeknight meal. You'll make this recipe again and again!

### INGREDIENTS

- For the chicken:
- 2 tablespoon olive oil, divided
- 1 ½ pounds boneless skinless chicken thighs
- For the adobo seasoning:
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ¾ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- ½ teaspoon red cayenne pepper
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon coriander
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- For the sofrito & rice:
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup finely diced green pepper
- ¼ cup finely diced white onion
- ¼ cup finely diced cilantro
- Optional: 1 jalapeno, diced
- ¼ teaspoon ground coriander
- ¼ teaspoon cumin
- ¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon oregano
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 1 ¼ cups water
- 1 cup basmati white rice (don't use brown, it will take too long to cook)\*\*
- ¾ cup frozen peas (or rinsed and drained pigeon peas)
- OPTIONAL: ½ cup pitted green olives

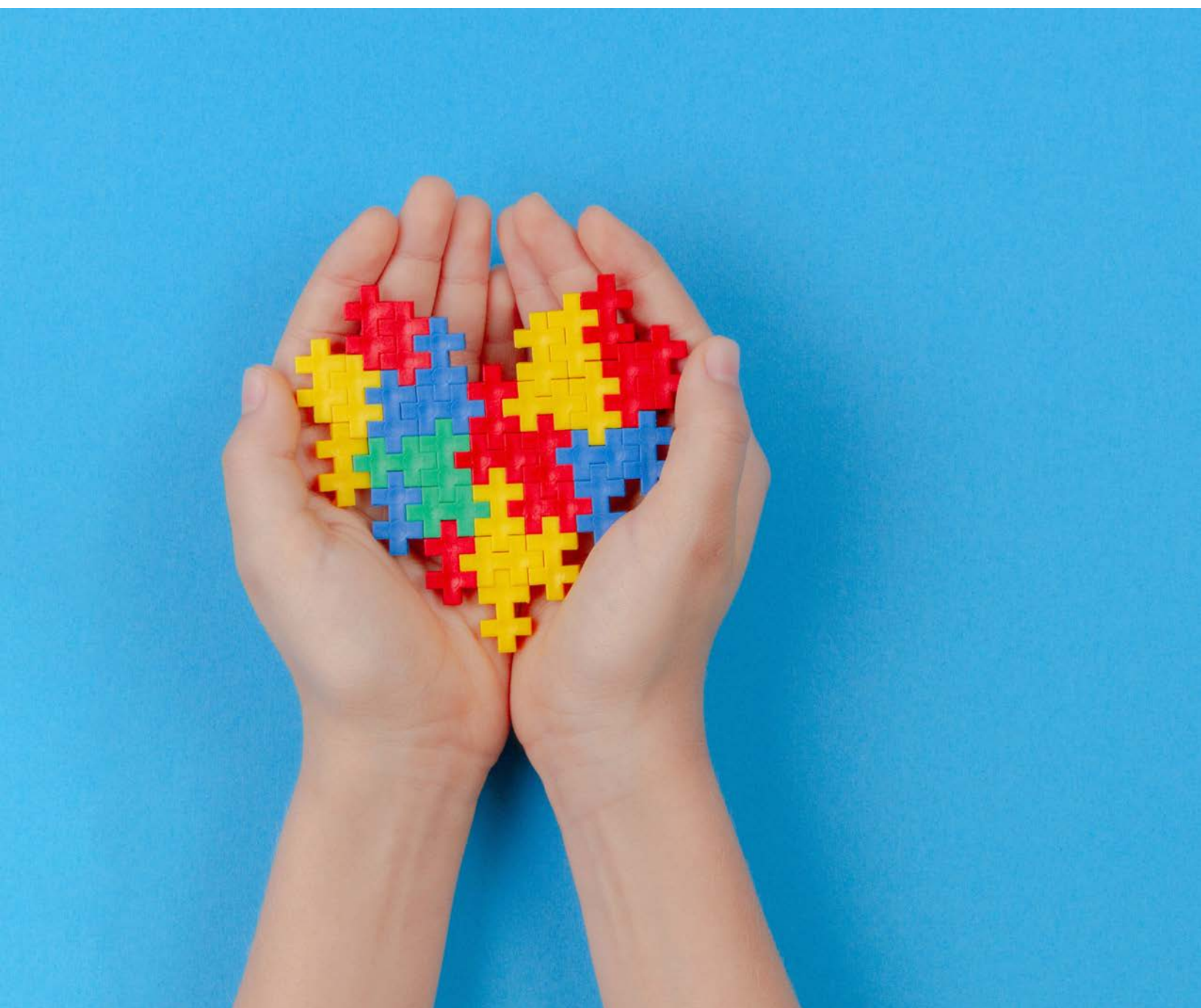
<https://www.ambitiouskitchen.com/puerto-rican-chicken-and-rice-arroz-con-pollo/>













## THE DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES AUTISM TRAININGS

The Learning and Development Department of Developmental Services Southeast Regional Office, announces a few exciting learning opportunities coming up in April. Trainings are free and you can sign up easily by clicking on the blue links.

### FIRST, TO RECOGNIZE AUTISM AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE MONTH, WE ARE BRINGING YOU:

- Lauren Richardi and Shelby Richardi are sisters who will share their perspective on living with Autism and their journey into adulthood. They touch on early education, family support, transition years, the pandemic and shifting their services to Agency with Choice.  
Monday, 4/3/23, 10am – 11am  
More information and registration here: <https://conta.cc/3F3dDIZ>
- Patti Menzel, who will share her journey of living with Autism to help you better understand what life is like with ASD. Patti highlights some of the incredible strengths of those with Autism and helps to break down some common stereotypes.  
Tuesday, 4/4/23, 1pm – 2:30pm  
More information and registration here: <https://conta.cc/3JUjW4y>

And we will be offering Beyond Pronouns: Supporting and Welcoming Gender Diverse People.

This session, presented by Sally Campbell Galman, will guide participants through current research and thinking around how to build welcoming, supportive workplace and day program environments for people of all genders, with a special focus on transgender and nonbinary people, in our work environments and programs.

Wednesday, 4/19/23, 10am – 11:30am

More information and registration here: <https://conta.cc/3YrfXRd>



Together  
Venture

Diversity  
Equity  
Inclusion

[together@venturecs.org](mailto:together@venturecs.org)