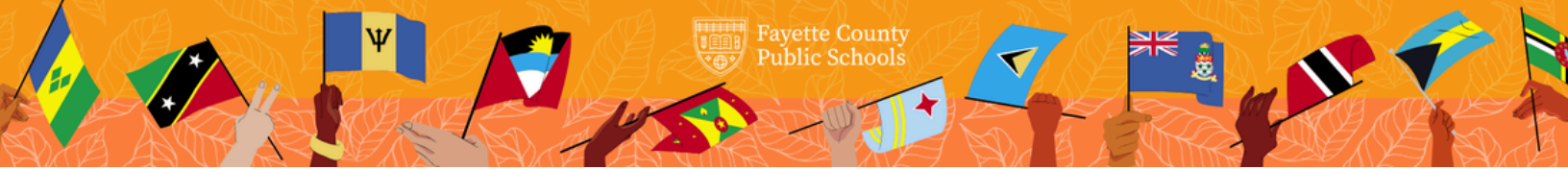


Caribbean-American Heritage Month

A framework for history, belonging
and academic connection



History

National Caribbean-American Heritage Month is observed every June to recognize and celebrate the rich history, vibrant culture, and profound contributions of Americans of Caribbean descent. The effort to establish this national month was led by Dr. Claire Nelson, founder of the Institute of Caribbean Studies (ICS). In 1999, the ICS began a petition for a national recognition week, which quickly garnered widespread community support and evolved into a campaign for a full heritage month.

The legislative journey culminated in 2005 when the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously adopted a concurrent resolution (H.Con.Res. 71) sponsored by Congresswoman Barbara Lee, recognizing the significance of Caribbean-American people and their history. The Senate passed the resolution in February 2006, and on June 5, 2006, President George W. Bush issued the first official presidential proclamation declaring June as National Caribbean-American Heritage Month.

The month of June holds particular significance as it aligns with the celebration of mid-year cultural festivals across the Caribbean, as well as the anniversaries of several historical migration milestones. It serves to honor early historical figures—such as Founding Father Alexander Hamilton (born in Nevis) and Chicago founder Jean Baptiste Point du Sable (born in Haiti)—as well as millions of modern educators, activists, scientists, and artists who shape the fabric of American society.

Key Concepts & Geographies

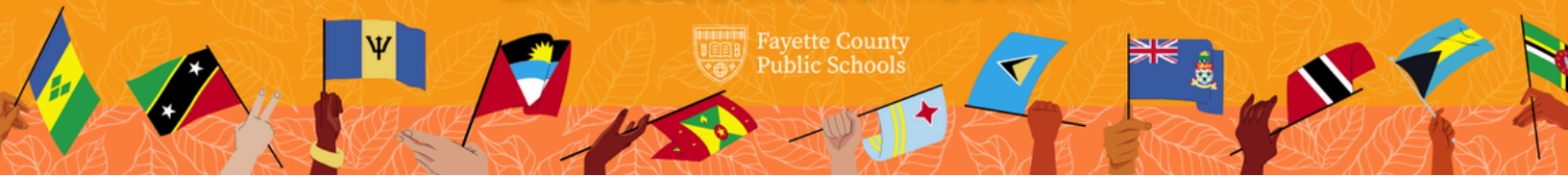
The Caribbean Region: A vast archipelago of islands, islets, reefs, and cays spanning the Caribbean Sea. The region is characterized by diverse linguistic, cultural, and political colonial histories, encompassing the Anglophone (English-speaking), Hispanophone (Spanish-speaking), Francophone (French/Creole-speaking), and Dutch-speaking Caribbean.

Complex Waves of Migration: While indigenous Caribbean individuals have lived in the region for centuries and enslaved Africans were brought to the region in colonial times, major voluntary immigration waves occurred in the mid-20th century. Early 20th Century migration brought agricultural workers, nurses, and laborers to help build American infrastructure and fill wartime labor shortages, while subsequent waves brought political refugees and highly skilled professionals.

Vibrant Cultures: Caribbean culture is defined by the blending of diverse cultural, religious, and artistic forms resulting from the historical interactions of Indigenous Taíno and Carib peoples, enslaved Africans, European colonizers, and East Asian indentured laborers.

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Barriers To Belonging

Invisible Barriers

- The "Linguistic Hierarchy" Burden: Many Caribbean-American students speak English-based creoles, patois (such as Jamaican Patois), or French-based Creoles (such as Haitian Creole) as their primary home language. Educators frequently miscategorize these sophisticated, rule-governed languages as "broken English" or poor grammar, creating a heavy sense of academic shame and linguistic isolation for the student.
- Intra-Racial Grouping and Erasure: Caribbean-American students are routinely grouped under broad, generalized American racial checkboxes (such as Black or Hispanic) without acknowledgment of their distinct ethnic, national, or cultural heritages. This erases their unique immigrant experiences, family dynamics, and historical perspectives within the classroom.
- The Trauma of Climate Disruption: Many Caribbean families maintain deep, fluid ties to their home islands. When catastrophic hurricanes or environmental crises strike the Caribbean region, students carry immense, invisible anxiety regarding the safety of extended family, economic instability, and potential sudden displacement, which can severely disrupt their academic focus.

Common Misconceptions

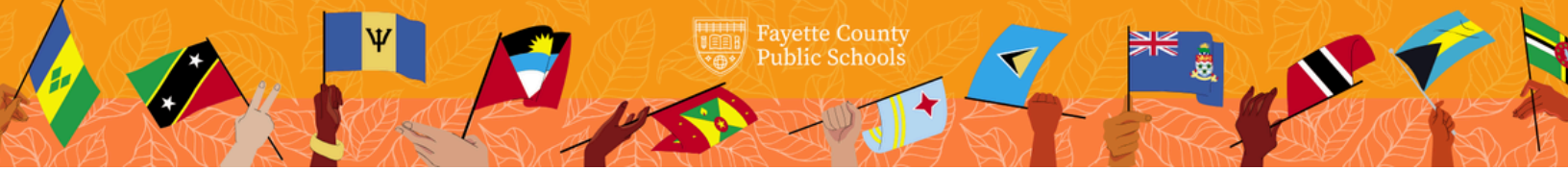
- **"The Caribbean is just a uniform holiday destination"**: Media representations heavily reduce the Caribbean to a monolithic playground of beaches, luxury resorts, and cruise ships. This tourist-centric lens erases the complex economic realities, sovereign political structures, systemic challenges, and profound intellectual histories of the individual nations.
- **"All Black Caribbean immigrants share the same exact experience as African Americans"**: While sharing a profound ancestral connection to Africa and the historical trauma of the transatlantic slave trade, Caribbean immigrants navigate a distinct trajectory as voluntary immigrants, dealing with immigration laws, dual-citizenship identities, and specific post-colonial national politics.
- **"All Caribbean people speak Spanish or listen to Reggae"**: This ignores the vast linguistic and artistic variance of the region. A student from Trinidad and Tobago may grow up listening to Soca and Chutney music (reflecting South Asian influences) and speaking English, while a student from Puerto Rico speaks Spanish, and a student from Haiti speaks French and creole.

Common Microaggressions

- Adopting mock, exaggerated accents: Imitating Jamaican Patois or a Spanish-Caribbean accent as a joke or a form of casual teasing directly pathologizes a student's native cadence and alienates them from peer spaces.
- "You don't sound like you're from the islands": Implies that all Caribbean individuals must possess an exaggerated stereotype or a specific level of broken English to be "authentically" Caribbean, dismissing the reality of second- and third-generation students.
- "Is it safe/civilized over there?": Asking patronizing questions about infrastructure, running water, or safety when a student mentions their family's home country relies on outdated, colonial-era savior tropes and demeans the student's heritage.

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Education Connections

Alignment with FCPS Portrait of a Graduate

- **Critical Thinker:** Analyzing the impact of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) alongside the American and French Revolutions challenges students to evaluate how concepts of universal human rights and freedom were legally defined, resisted, and enforced by different global powers.
- **Effective Communicator:** Exploring the oral traditions, folklore (such as Anansi the Spider stories), and complex code-switching practices of Caribbean literature expands students' linguistic awareness, helping them analyze how voice and dialect drive narrative power.
- **Empowered Learner:** Encouraging Caribbean-American students to connect their ancestral history—such as investigating the indigenous ecological knowledge of the Taíno or the math and geometry involved in traditional Caribbean steelpan tuning—validates home culture as a driving asset for modern academic pursuit.
- **Creative Problem Solver:** Studying how Caribbean diaspora organizations co-design mutual-aid networks, remittances, and disaster relief frameworks following environmental catastrophes teaches students how to engineer localized, sustainable solutions to complex global logistics problems.
- **Collaborative Team Member:** Creating learning environments that intentionally honor multi-lingual collaboration and diverse immigrant perspectives builds the global cultural fluency and cross-cultural empathy required to navigate modern, international professional teams.

KY Standards Alignment

Universal Social Studies Inquiry Standards

- **Using Evidence:** Gathering relevant evidence from credible sources; in Grades 6-12, determining accuracy, context, bias, and intended use.
- **Communicating Conclusions:** Constructing explanations and/or arguments using reasoning and information; in Grades 6-12, using claims and evidence from multiple sources while acknowledging counterclaims, strengths, and limitations of the arguments.
- **2.H.CH.1:** Identify and compare the diverse North American cultural groups of the past and today.
- **3.G.HI.1:** Explain how the cultural aspects of a region spread beyond its borders.
- **5.C.CV.1; 8.C.CV.1:** Describe the democratic principles of equality before the law, inalienable rights, and consent of the governed...
- **HS.C.CP.3:** Evaluate the civil responsibilities of individuals within a society
- **HS.C.CV.3:** Analyze the impact of the efforts of individuals and reform movements on the expansion of civil rights and liberties locally, nationally and internationally.
- **HS.C.PR.2:** Explain how active citizens can affect the lawmaking process locally, nationally and internationally.