

CARIBBEAN AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH



Although frequently included into the category of African Americans, Caribbeans are very different regarding culture diversity, races, religions, and languages.¹ Caribbean Americans are also referred to as West Indian Americans.² They are considered those who can trace the heritage to islands in the Caribbean Sea, nations on northern coast of South America and Central American Belize.³ “Numbering conservatively at some 3 million by the U.S. Census, or just over 9 percent of the total foreign-born population, Caribbean immigrants may be black, white, Latino, East Indian, Chinese, Arab, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc., thus it is quite difficult to make broad generalizations of this unique group.” Seventy percent of Caribbean immigrants live in New York, Florida, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Washington, D.C. and other states. The largest groups include Cubans, Dominicans, Jamaicans, Haitians, Trinidadians, and Guyanese.

St. Louis is actually home to the Caribbean Association of St. Louis.⁴ This organization hosts an “Annual Picnic,” where they had music, food, games, raffles and fun. This year’s picnic will be held on June 9th at Endicott Park, 2950 Endicott Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63114-4531. Another event of interest will be held in August, which is the Caribbean Café at the International Institute’s Festival of Nations located at Tower Grove Park in St. Louis. More information about the organization and other events can be found at www.caribestl.org. The site also lists local restaurants: DePalm Tree Restaurant, Jay’s International Food and Global Foods Market.

According to the Institute of Caribbean Studies, which is located in Washington, D.C., descendants of Caribbean lineage have been huge contributors to the United States of America.⁵ The Institute notes various persons of Caribbean heritage including the First Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. He was from Nevis, a Caribbean island. There are other famous people who have Caribbean ancestry, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, Cicely Tyson, W.E.B. Dubois, James Weldon Johnson, Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier. In 1999, the ICS petitioned President Bill Clinton to recognize Caribbean American Heritage Month. A number of activities were held in 2000 to encourage the designation of June as Caribbean Heritage Month in Washington, D.C. Congresswoman Barbara Lee tabled a legislative bill regarding National Caribbean American Heritage Month in 2004. ICS Founder and President Dr. Claire Nelson submitted language to be used in the legislation. In June 2005, the bill was passed in the House; in February 2006 it was passed in the Senate. H. Con. Res. 71 was unanimously adopted.⁶ President George W. Bush signed a proclamation making it official on June 5, 2006.⁷ 2018 marks the 12th Anniversary of the National Caribbean American Heritage Month.⁸

DID YOU KNOW? As of June 2013, the Caribbean American population was about 11.1 million.⁹ Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Jamaicans, Haitians, Trinidadians/Tobagonians, Bajans, Bahamians and U.S. Virgin Islanders make up the largest Caribbean ancestry groups in America.

¹ <http://www.ibtimes.com/caribbean-americans-invisible-minority-seeking-identity-affirmation-795709>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Indian_Americans

³ <http://www.ibtimes.com/caribbean-americans-invisible-minority-seeking-identity-affirmation-795709>

⁴ www.caribestl.org

⁵ www.icsdc.org

⁶ <http://www.caribbeanamericanmonth.org/>

⁷ www.icsdc.org

⁸ <http://www.caribbeanamericanmonth.org/>

⁹ <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/pr/about/civilrights/?cid=nrcseprd1331869>