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PPPL celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month. From left to right: Berta Càceres, a Honduran environmental activist, indigenous leader, and co-founder of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras; France Córdova, an astrophysicist and the 14th director of the National Science Foundation; and rapper Bad Bunny. (Collage by Kiran Sudarsanan)

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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (/PPPL-TODAY/CATEGORY/DIVERSITY-AND-INCLUSION)

PPPL celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month Sept. 15 to Oct. 15

A rapper, an environmental activist, and an astrophysicist and National Science Foundation director

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By Giana Aguilar-Valencia

Bad Bunny – Puerto Rican Rapper and Singer (Born 1994)

Benito Antonio Martinez Ocasio, also known as Bad Bunny, is a Puerto Rican rapper and singer.

Martinez Ocasio produced the first all-Spanish record to reach No.1 on the Billboard 200. Unlike many Latino artists, he is comfortable painting his nails, wearing skirts, and addressing machismo in Latino culture.

Martinez Ocasio comes from a lower-middle-class family. He was born in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico and was a fan of a style of music known as reggaeton growing up. His inspiration came from Daddy Yankee and Tego Calderón.

He began releasing songs on SoundCloud while in college. In 2016, his song “Diles” caught the attention of producers. He has since released albums with major artists like J Balvin and has performed at the 2020 Super Bowl.

Aside from music, Bad Bunny is conscious of social issues. He has addressed the effects of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, focused on domestic violence in Latin America, and participated in the protest demanding Puerto Rico governor Ricardo Rosselló resign.

Berta Càceres – Environmental activist, indigenous leader, and co-founder of COPINH (1971-2016)

Berta Càceres was a Honduran environmental activist, indigenous leader, and co-founder of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras who made an impact despite being born and raised in one of the most dangerous places to be an environmentalist.

Càceres was born in La Esperanza, Honduras, home to the Lenca people,

the predominant indigenous group in southwestern Honduras. She was raised in a time significant for its violence in Central America. Berta's mother, Austra Bertha Flores Lopez, was a midwife and social activist who cared for refugees from El Salvador. Austra served as a two-term mayor for La Esperanza, as a congresswoman, and as a governor of the Department of Intibucá.

Càceres attended a local university and graduated with a teaching qualification. While a student and an activist, she co-founded COPINH. As a co-founder and coordinator, she led campaigns on a wide range of issues such as illegal logging, plantation owners, and the presence of US military bases on Lenca land.

Càceres was a supporter of feminism, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) rights, and broader social issues. She lived by this quote: "They are afraid of us because we are not afraid of them." As a promising activist, she was also threatened. On March 2, 2016, armed intruders entered her home and killed her. She had been accompanied by Gustavo Castro Soto for an activism meeting planned for the next day.

Even after her death, Càceres was recognized for her voice. In 2015, she was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize. In 2012, she was awarded the Shalom Award by the Society for Justice and Peace at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. She was also highlighted by the Global Witness, an international human rights organization.

France Córdova — astrophysicist and the 14th director of the National Science Foundation (Born 1947)

The eldest of 12 children, France Córdova was born in Paris and later moved to Germany due to her father's work. When she was six years old, she and her family moved to California. After high school, she attended Stanford University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in English. While at Stanford, she conducted anthropological fieldwork in a Zapotec Indian pueblo in Oaxaca, Mexico. She went on to attend the California Institute of Technology and received a Ph.D. in physics.

Córdova worked with many laboratories and institutions and became a chief scientist at NASA in 1993. She went on to become vice-chancellor for research and a professor of physics at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She was later appointed chancellor of the University of California, Riverside. Córdova initiated the steps to establishing the University of California Riverside School of Medicine.

Córdova became the eleventh president of Purdue University in 2007.

While president, she prioritized student success and interdisciplinary research. Ending her term as president, the trustees credited her achievements in leading the school into groundbreaking records for research funding, reputational rankings, and student retention rates.

Córdova also made numerous scientific contributions and published many scientific research papers. Her areas of focus were observational and experimental astrophysics, multi-spectral research on X-ray and gamma-ray sources, and space-borne instrumentation.

President Barack Obama appointed Córdova to the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution in 2009. President Obama later nominated her as the 14th head of the National Science Foundation. She received the highest honor from NASA: the NASA distinguished service medal.

