

# FRANCISCO CARTAGENA PUERTO RICAN ACTIVIST

b. January 18, 1986

*“Being different should not be a reason to hate or discriminate against a person. There are more reasons to respect sexual diversity than stars in the universe.”*

**He is a poet, a newspaper columnist and a leading Puerto Rican human rights activist.**

Francisco J. “El Jimagua” Cartagena Méndez is a Puerto Rican writer and well-known human rights activist.

Cartagena was born an identical twin in Bayamón, Puerto Rico. His mother died from complications of diabetes when he was 11. He adopted the pseudonym El Jimagua at age 14, when he began to share his poetry on social media. The name derives from the word “twins” (jimagua) in Arahuc, the language of the island’s indigenous Taíno people.

At age 18, Cartagena came out to his father, who accepted the news unconditionally. Cartagena began his human rights activism soon thereafter.

Cartagena was one of the principal promoters of “Boicot La Comay,” the boycott of a Puerto Rican television program that promoted homophobia and violence against gays. It resulted in the show’s cancellation. On the news outlet Univisión Puerto Rico, he denounced a religious group who had taken photos at a Gay Pride celebration in San Juan and posted them to a homophobic website with derogatory comments.

Cartagena became a published author at the age of 22, when his book of gay-oriented poetry, “Vuelo en Libertad” (Flight in Freedom), was released. At the time, gay literature was rarely seen in Puerto Rico. The same year, the island’s lead newspaper, El Nuevo Día, hired him as its LGBTT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Transsexual) columnist.

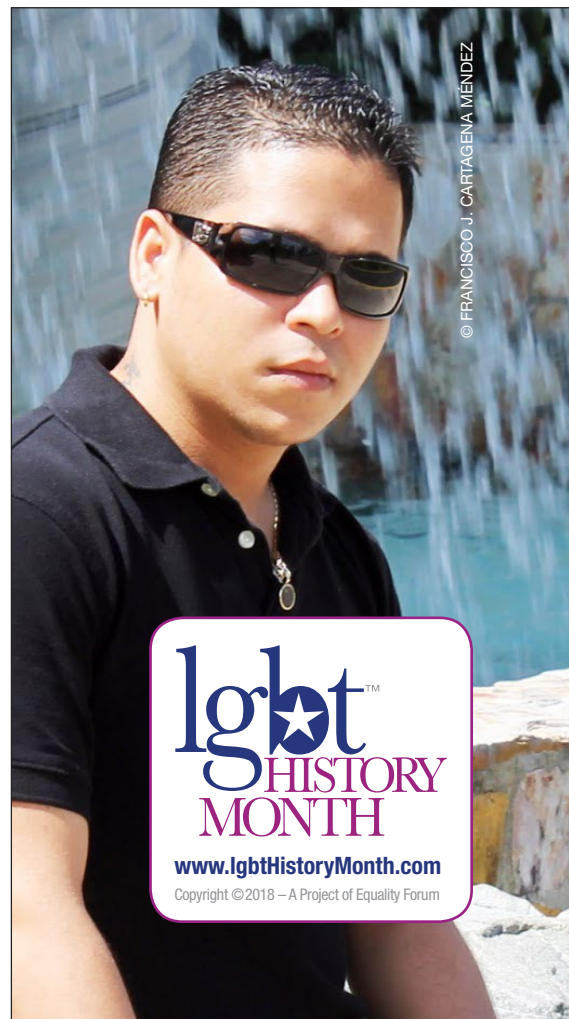
Cartagena writes for newspapers and blogs in Puerto Rico, the United States, Latin America and Europe. His numerous columns address topics such as sexual diversity, LGBTT suicide prevention and the effect of religious fundamentalism on LGBTT health.

In 2013 Cartagena and his partner, José Santiago, cofounded the nonprofit organization Fundación ASI (Inclusive Social Action Foundation) to advocate for socially disadvantaged communities, including LGBTT people, the elderly, children, and single mothers and fathers. The same year, he produced and directed a “El Fénix Erótico” (The Erotic Phoenix) in which he debuted as an actor. The sold-out show featured comedy, parodies and recitation of his poetry.

Cartagena won an international poetry contest in Argentina for his poem “A Free Land to Love” in 2014. In 2016 he organized Talk About Prevention, an awareness campaign aimed at averting pedophilia. He was also named the ambassador of an international project of ONG LGBT Spain, #PorUnFuturoSinViolencia, designed to address bullying, homophobia and gender violence.

In September 2017, Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico causing massive power failures and economic disaster. Although Cartagena faced his own hardship, he traveled to three heavily hit towns to provide humanitarian aid. At the end of October, Cartagena’s apartment remained without power. An intruder broke in, robbed him and stabbed him brutally three times.

Having survived the near-fatal attack, Cartagena continues his activism. His latest book, “Fundamentos de la Equidad y el Discrimen” (Fundamentals of Equity and Discrimination), was published in the fall of 2018.



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