

NYBG

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 12, 2021

The New York Botanical Garden Presents Prominent Authors, Chefs, and Historians in *The Food Dialogues: Reclaiming Cultural Heritage Through Food*

Culinary Historian Jessica B. Harris Moderates Conversations between Carla Hall and Tonya Hopkins, Michael Twitty and JJ Johnson, and Maricel Presilla and Von Diaz about Using Food to Re-Examine and Redefine Ideas about Heritage and Identity

Online Series Takes Place on Three Fridays, May 21, June 18, and July 23, 2021, at 11 a.m.



Speakers in the upcoming NYBG series *The Food Dialogues: Reclaiming Cultural Heritage Through Food* include (left to right) culinary icon Carla Hall, food historian Michael W. Twitty, and writer and documentary producer Von Diaz.

Bronx, NY—The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) announces a series of virtual conversations, *The Food Dialogues: Reclaiming Cultural Heritage Through Food*, in which prominent authors, chefs, and food historians will re-examine and redefine ideas about heritage and identity through food. Culinary historian Jessica B. Harris, Ph.D., will moderate conversations between culinary icon Carla Hall and writer-entrepreneur Tonya Hopkins, food historian Michael W. Twitty and chef JJ Johnson, and writer and documentary producer Von Diaz and award-winning author, chef, and restaurateur Maricel Presilla, Ph.D. *The Food Dialogues* take place on three Fridays, May 21, June 18, and July 23, 2021, at 11 a.m.

The hour-long webinars are free, but registration is required. Registrants will receive login instructions. For more information and to register, go to <https://www.nybg.org/event/the-food-dialogues-reclaiming-cultural-heritage-through-food/>

The full schedule and speaker biographies follow.

The Food Dialogues: Reclaiming Cultural Heritage Through Food

Three Fridays, May 21, June 18, & July 23, 2021; 11 a.m.–12 p.m.

The Food Dialogues will be moderated by **Jessica B. Harris, Ph.D.**, author of 12 critically acclaimed cookbooks and celebrated as a leading expert on the food and foodways of the African Diaspora. Dr. Harris has lectured on African American food and culture across the U.S. and abroad, and her work has appeared in numerous publications. Among her awards and accolades are the 2020 James Beard Lifetime Achievement Award, an honorary doctorate from Johnson & Wales University, and the DeMasters Award from the Association of Food Journalists. For Black History Month 2021, *People* magazine highlighted Dr. Harris as an inspiring trailblazer in her field.

- *May 21: A Conversation with Carla Hall and Tonya Hopkins*
Culinary icon **Carla Hall** and food historian **Tonya Hopkins** set the table for the series with a wide-ranging, entertaining discussion about the food of African Americans and how it has shaped American cuisine and culture.
 - For **Carla Hall**, soul food is in her soul. The culinary traditions shaped by the African Diaspora drive not just her passion for food; they are woven into her compelling personal history. The beloved television chef from ABC's Emmy Award-winning lifestyle series *The Chew* and Bravo's *Top Chef* is a featured culinary contributor to *Good Morning America* and the Food Network, as well as a sought-after speaker and popular author. *Carla Hall's Soul Food: Everyday and Celebration* made best cookbook lists across the country in 2018 and received an NAACP Image Awards nomination.
 - Writer-entrepreneur **Tonya Hopkins** is founder of *The Food Griot*, a multimedia storytelling platform that provides historical and contemporary culinary content. She has written for scholarly and consumer publications and has appeared on radio and television. Hopkins co-founded the James Hemings Society (named for Thomas Jefferson's enslaved, French-trained chef), which looks to rediscover the origins and evolution of American cuisine in creative and inclusive ways.

- *June 18: A Conversation with Michael Twitty and JJ Johnson*
The African American hand in rice is foundational to American food from its introduction as a colonial crop to its presence in every cross-cultural cuisine. Food historian **Michael W. Twitty** and chef **JJ Johnson** go far and wide to reveal the history and present-day importance of rice on the plate. They will also talk about the food traditions of Juneteenth.
 - **Michael W. Twitty** is a culinary historian and James Beard Award-winning author of *The Cooking Gene*. His books and *Afroculinaria* blog explore and promote

- African American foodways and the culinary traditions of Africa and its Diaspora, including the food culture of the American South. For him, understanding and acknowledging where one's food comes from is critically important, and food education is more vital than ever. *Rice*, his new cookbook, shows how the world's most versatile staple became a star in Creole, Acadian, soul food, Low Country, and Gulf Coast kitchens.
- **JJ Johnson** is a James Beard Award-winning chef known for boundary-breaking cuisine that connects the foodways of West Africa and Asia to the Americas. His ability to combine culturally relevant ingredients with classical technique is showcased at Harlem's FIELDTRIP, his quick-casual rice bowl shop that highlights rice traditions from around the world. He is the co-author of the award-winning cookbook *Between Harlem and Heaven*.
 - *July 23: A Conversation with Von Diaz and Maricel Presilla*
The foods of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands with a Spanish colonial past are a culinary and cultural hybrid of indigenous, African, Spanish, and American ingredients and techniques. The stories they tell reveal a creative response to a complex colonial history. Storyteller and journalist **Von Diaz** and food historian and chef **Maricel Presilla** explore these cuisines, their history, and how their culinary cultures divulge their past.
 - Puerto Rican-born, Atlanta-raised **Von Diaz** explores food, culture, and identity as a writer, documentary producer, and the author of *Coconuts & Collards: Recipes and Stories from Puerto Rico to the Deep South*. Her work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Bon Appétit*, *Food & Wine*, and numerous cookbooks and anthologies. She has also been a reporter for National Public Radio, StoryCorps, New York public radio station WNYC, and the Southern Foodways Alliance. She teaches food studies and oral history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
 - **Maricel Presilla, Ph.D.**, is an award-winning author, culinary historian, chef and restaurateur, and a widely recognized expert on Latin American cuisines, the capsicum (or pepper) family of plants, cacao, and chocolate. Her book *Gran Cocina Latina: The Food of Latin America* was the James Beard Foundation's 2013 Cookbook of the Year. Actively engaged in public speaking, she has lectured and conducted tastings at NYBG, including Islamic food and agriculture for the 2011 exhibition *Spanish Paradise: Gardens of the Alhambra* and capsicums of the Americas for programs on tropical edibles. She is founder and Americas Director of the International Chocolate Awards, the largest independent fine chocolate competition in the world.

###

Presented by the Humanities Institute and supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The New York Botanical Garden is located at 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458. For more information, visit nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

Media Contacts: Stevenson Swanson, sswanson@nybg.org
Nicholas Leshi, nleshi@nybg.org