



# PUERTO RICO: THE RESILIENCE OF COLOR

*Identity and Survival in the American Caribbean*

Photo Essay | By Covadonga Riesco | January 2026

# IDENTITY AND SURVIVAL

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Beyond the postcard-perfect beaches and the global fame of *Despacito*, lies a deeper Puerto Rico. This visual essay documents a territory where the scars of Hurricane Maria are not an end, but a new beginning.

From the healing murals of Yauco to the storytelling rhythms of Ponce, Boricua identity emerges as an act of defiance. It is a portrait of a people who, facing blackouts and uncertainty, embody the unshakeable mantra: "Puerto Rico Se Levanta" (Puerto Rico Rises).



## **BETWEEN FAME AND FRAGILITY**

A view of La Perla from Old San Juan. Once a 19th-century slaughterhouse district for those excluded from the walled city, this neighborhood now fights to maintain its soul amidst the Despacito-driven tourism boom. As runners take to the boardwalk at dusk, the flickering streetlights serve as a quiet reminder of the island's fragile power grid and the persistent energy crisis.



## **SALSA AS LIVING HISTORY**

Captured in this mural at the Ponce Cultural Center, the gaze of legends like Héctor Lavoe and Cheo Feliciano watches over the city. Known as "The Pearl of the South," Ponce is the cradle where African rhythms evolved into the global phenomenon of Salsa. As locals explain, this music was never mere entertainment, but a chronicle of resistance born in the sugar cane fields. Through these immortal faces, the oral tradition of Afro-Caribbean identity continues to echo.



## **THE ART OF REGENERATION**

The vibrant facades of the Yaucomatic project in Yauco. Following the devastation of Hurricane Maria and subsequent earthquakes, this urban art initiative turned decay into an open-air museum to jumpstart the local economy. It stands as a symbol of adaptation in a region where the traditional coffee industry has struggled, and where young entrepreneurs now fight for food sovereignty in an island that imports over 80% of what it consumes.

*"We are like rice:  
you can find a  
Puerto Rican  
anywhere in the  
world."*

— Sony, Local Guide in Ponce.

