



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2026 Volume II: Latinx Histories, Cultures, and Communities

The Transcultural and Historical Connections of Bad Bunny's Music

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Introduction

This unit will explore how history and culture are reflected in musical production, specifically Puerto Rico's history and culture through some of the musical genres of the archipelago. To create structure to this unit we will be anchoring the flow of lessons on the 2026 Superbowl half-time show. Musical genres often have a broader context, an origin story involving transnational migration because of colonization and gentrification. These genres explained in this unit— reggaetón, salsa, bomba and plena—have roots in Puerto Rico but are connected to Africa, the Caribbean, the US and Central and South America. All the genres of music presented in this performance have transnational journeys that come from colonization, migration, commerce and technology. The unit will expose students to the variety of cultural connections and key historical events to illuminate the social and political issues facing Puerto Rico.

The overall goal of the unit is for students to develop cultural and historical awareness of the patterns we see cycle through history and society. Specifically, how does colonization impact communities? How does art reflect history and culture? This not only highlights the transcultural connections that Bad Bunny's art reflects, but it speaks to an interdependence among nations that affect population, culture and way of life of these places and regions. The art analyzed in this unit will focus on how artists resist these inhumane aspects of colonization, while also inciting pride and joy in community.

This unit is written at a seventh-grade level but with the background knowledge necessary to scaffold up to higher grades as needed. The key objectives of the unit will address the Pennsylvania Core Standards for Economics, History Civics and Reading (which can be found in the Appendix) and the following essential questions.

- What are the human characteristics of the region related to culture, population and settlement, economics and political activities and what are the possible connections to the geography of the region?
- What are the civic issues for the region past and today, and how might other human characteristics of place and regions connect to those issues?
- How does interdependence among nations affect the population, culture and way of the life of places and regions?

This unit could easily be taught across the curriculum. Music courses could delve into the genres of music,

Spanish and/or English courses to analyze lyrics, and Social Studies courses could expound on many of the interrelated aspects and key events that shaped Puerto Rican history.

The culminating project of this unit will be a product to display or perform that answers the question How does colonization impact a community? Students may choose to create a political cartoon or a letter to a senator about the conditions of Puerto Rico, or a dance, song, or poem about the impact of colonization of a community. The project will be assessed using Criterion C (Communicating) of the Individuals and Societies IB Middle Years Programme. The Communicating Criterion expectations are for communication in the project to be clear, organized effectively, and with sources cited.

Rationale

In his conclusion of *Harvest of Empire* Juan Gonzalez says, “It behooves all Americans to recognize how essential Latinx culture and the Spanish language have been to our own history and traditions. Our schools should be dissecting and analyzing the new hybrid cultural trends that emerged in the twentieth century from the amalgamations and fusions of Latinx, African American, and Anglo-American arts.”[1] I took this as a call to action.

The seventh-grade social studies curriculum in Pittsburgh Public Schools focuses on the Western Hemisphere. While the textbook the district purchased in 2024 discusses banana republics and proxy wars, nothing is mentioned about Puerto Rico’s situation. The story of Puerto Rico is important for my students to know because it uncovers the layers of consequences related to colonization. By expanding their knowledge about Puerto Rico, my goal is for them to be able to recognize patterns and draw connections to their lives. It’s just kismet that we can do this using the quintessential American cultural artifact of the Super Bowl.

I was inspired to tackle this topic by the university professors already pioneering courses on Bad Bunny including Dr. Vanessa Diaz, Dr. Petra Rivera-Rideau, and Dr. Albert Laguna. It is worth noting that much of Bad Bunny’s work may be too mature for younger students, so I choose to focus on the super bowl halftime show as it was broadcast on national television so is therefore a level of general appropriateness for middle and high school students.

This unit will use Bad Bunny’s performance to highlight the transcultural and historical connections of Puerto Rico in the social studies classroom. The show was dense with symbolism and cultural references, and by highlighting and explaining those aspects we can see how history is reflected in his art. We can take a thirteen-minute musical performance during a sporting event to explain how he uses rhythms with long, fascinating histories that touch on race and migration. For the sake of clarity, I’ve chosen to re-order the songs along a historical timeline instead of the order they were performed. I’ve attempted to create a unit where teachers could re-order as necessary or just pick one genre/historical era to teach. I believe it’s important for students to go beyond the entertainment level to analyze and ask questions like “How does Bad Bunny reflect the history and culture of Puerto Rico?” Analyzing the perspective of the artist will activate them to consume media critically. Fostering the ability to analyze pop culture to reveal deeper truths about ourselves is a valuable practice. I believe this process will help students develop media literacy skills necessary for productive engagement in our society today.

I teach seventh grade social studies at Barack Obama Academy of International Studies. We have around 650 students in sixth through twelfth grade. We have a predominantly Black student body, (seventy-six percent), with well over half (sixty-five percent) of the population considered low-income[2]. We are an International Baccalaureate school. Part of the IB framework is to focus on global perspectives, which means including international viewpoints and promoting cultural awareness. Another core value of our program is inquiry-based learning, where students are given opportunities to investigate, think critically, and communicate their knowledge and understanding in meaningful ways.[3]

Life can lack a sense of control for middle school students, almost appearing random. It sometimes seems like they think we woke up in the United States and *poof* we're a world power. It's important for students to seek understanding on how this happened. How are they impacted by this history? What perspectives are missing? What does it mean to be a citizen of a country? It is so important for students to understand *how* resources of a place are managed that leads to wealth and/or poverty and *for whom*. This unit will describe how the crisis facing Puerto Rico today is not the fault of a one-off devastating Hurricane but a systemic exploitation of resources that has occurred over centuries and continues to destabilize communities.

It's also important to show that these communities are not just "letting it happen," they are constantly resisting in many ways. My students, predominantly low-income and Black, are growing up in a segregated, racist city.[4] Showing them examples of resistance may empower them to embrace their voice. Some of the examples we will use to discuss Bad Bunny's music reflect their culture, specifically examples of resistance. It's important for students to not only understand the various effects of colonization and gentrification, but they also should know how people resisted these imperial forces and fought for their community. The unit will highlight various examples of songs that call out authoritative practices. Allowing students to see how art is used to educate and stimulate a response to oppression helps students expand what they think is possible. It helps them dream bigger, to know that there is more to this world. We must show our students who we are and what we have done if we want them to think about what they want for the world in a different way. We must open their eyes to the consequences of our actions so they can go beyond "I want this" to "How might getting this for me impact others?"

A secondary goal for this unit is for students to be able to identify various examples of how the interdependence among nations affects the population, culture, and way of life of the regions. The connections between Panama, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Caribbean diaspora in the United States will elevate the cultural and historical awareness of the US Latinx population by seeing how diverse and important the Latinx population has been and continues to be for our country. These explanations and music can also bring us closer together. As we discover the interdependence we unveil the interconnectedness.

Background and Content

Introduction (The First Two Minutes)

The show begins with the camera panning from what appears to be a street in Puerto Rico and drops you in front of a jíbaro in front of a sugar cane field. A jíbaro is a Puerto Rican self-sufficient farmer who traditionally lived in the rural Puerto Rican mountainside. Wearing a straw hat called a pava, the jíbaro is a symbol of Puerto Rican identity, like a cowboy of the United States.[5] As the introductory credits roll you see field

workers harvesting the sugar cane, imagery that pays homage to the enslaved indigenous Taínos and Africans who worked the sugar plantations.

As Bad Bunny begins his first song “Tití Me Preguntó” you see him wearing an elevated jíbaro outfit blended with football-jersey characteristics. The name “Ocasio” on the back is his maternal surname, and the number 64 is a nod to his late uncle.[6] The camera work is very tight for a performance on a football field. This provides a sense of intimacy, at eye level, like we are invited into his world. As we walk with him through his world he shows us parts of his culture, the coco frío stand, the elders playing dominos, the nail technician, the construction workers, the piraguas stand, the tacos, the boxers and the pawn shop. It gives the feeling that we’re on the streets of Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico from the Taínos to the 1930s

Prior to Europeans coming to the Americas the island known as Puerto Rico was home to the Taíno people.[7] The island was a Spanish colony from 1493 to 1898. In the early 16th century Spain had the Taínos and African slaves mining for gold. During this time the Taíno population dramatically declined. “The violence of the conquest, the germs brought by the settlers, and the perils of mining took a toll on Borikén’s indigenous communities. Early settlers constantly complained to the Crown that there was an abundance of gold but a shortage of workers to mine it. This became the justification for importing enslaved African peoples.”[8] By the 19th century chattel slavery resulted in the massive production of coffee, tobacco and sugar.

Throughout the 19th century Cuba and Puerto Rico were both vying for independence from Spain and often collaborated with each other in exile. In New York City in 1895 a revolutionary group with members from both islands created the flags of Cuba and Puerto Rico, interchanging the blue and red of each flag as a sign of solidarity against colonialism.[9] The blue in the Puerto Rican flag was changed to the darker blue to match the blue of the US flag when the island became a commonwealth of the US.[10] The United States, as part of the ideology of Manifest Destiny, was hoping to take control of the Caribbean islands to continue to dominate commerce in the Americas. The United States used yellow journalism and the sinking of the USS Maine to begin the Spanish-American War, which would eventually end with the Treaty of Paris and US controlling Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. “By century’s end, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Spain’s Cuban and Puerto Rican colonies, and much of Central America had become economic satellites of an expanding US empire.”[11]

During the first part of the 20th century the United States embarked on its exploitation of Puerto Rico in a variety of ways. The Foraker Act of 1900 replaced the Puerto Rican peso with the American dollar and disallowed the island from making commercial treaties with other countries.[12] While Cuba gained their independence in 1902, the US Supreme Court ruled on a series of cases called the Insular Cases (1901-22) that stated Puerto Rico was “foreign in a domestic sense,” which meant that Puerto Rico was “foreign” and not to be annexed into the country (meaning it would not become a state) and instead it was labeled a “domestic possession” of the US.[13] After the construction of the Panama Canal in 1914 most of the world transported its cargo on cheaper Panamanian and Liberian freighters. However, Puerto Rico was forced to use US ships (through The Jones Act of 1920). This caused the price of imported goods to rise due to higher transport costs, as much as 25 percent. The Jones Act also granted Puerto Ricans United States citizenship, meaning they can travel freely from the US to Puerto Rico. However, they do not pay federal taxes, they cannot vote in US presidential elections, and they do not have voting representation in the US Congress. Puerto Ricans are eligible to be drafted.[14]

The Great Depression and the World Wars increased the hardships faced on the island. Many people in the countryside lost their manual labor agriculture jobs due to the mechanization of industry. During this time the United States was also actively trying to control the population of the island through sterilization of women. From the 1930s-1970s around a third of the women in Puerto Rico were permanently altered to not be able to bear children.[15] A 1946 government report stated that around a million people needed to leave Puerto Rico to make the island prosper. “The government realized that without the massive exodus of people, economic growth in Puerto Rico would maybe hinder or slow down.”[16] In the following sections we will see how the government’s need for migration impacts culture and music of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

Salsa (Minutes Four - Nine)

Before Giancarlo Guerrero conducts the live string instrumentalists during “Mónaco,” the camera shows the video of an animated sapo concho, a crested toad native to Puerto Rico. Bad Bunny has featured the toad in imagery related to the album *DeBí TiRAR Más FOTos*, including a short film with the same name. The toad is endangered, which makes it a powerful symbol of gentrification of the island. Bad Bunny provides a pep-talk here, talking about how he believes he got here performing at the Super Bowl because he never gave up on himself. “You should believe in yourself too, you’re worth more than you think.”

We then witness a real wedding, love amidst the chaos. Lady Gaga sings a salsa-version of “Die with a Smile” wearing a light blue colored dress, the shade of blue associated with Puerto Rican independence. She also has the national flower of Puerto Rico on a broach, the red flor de maga. The wedding reception continues on a set that is similar to El Morro, a Spanish fort built in the 16th century to protect San Juan, which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.[17] While Bad Bunny sings “Baile Inolvidable” he dances salsa and says “baila sin miedo,” which means “dance without fear.” He also goes to tap a sleeping child awake, a common occurrence in family and community events.

Next Bad Bunny drops into his next song, “NUEVAYoL,” where he literally falls into a New York City street scene. New York has a huge Puerto Rican community referred to as Nuyorican. We see examples of that community in La Marqueta and Toñita, two real Nuyorican places in New York City, as well as a barber shop and hair being braided on a stoop.

In the video for “NUEVAYoL” there is a scene where the Puerto Rican flag is draped over the forehead of the Statue of Liberty. This occurred in 1977 by Puerto Rican nationalists raising awareness for independence. In 2000 Tito Kayak and other activists did it again to bring attention to issues facing the island, particularly the negative impact of the US military using the Puerto Rican island of Vieques as a live ammunition training site.

It’s worth noting that the first song on an album dripping with Puerto Rican culture is called “NUEVAYoL.” It samples the 1975 song “Un Verano en Nueva York” by one of the most famous salsa bands El Gran Combo De Puerto Rico. The original song waxes poetic about the common practice of Puerto Ricans going from the island to New York City for the summer. The introduction of the Dominican Dembow beat flawlessly supports this multicultural song. Bad Bunny does an impeccable job of interconnecting generations of migration through genres of music.

The dancing on the field/city streets is also reminiscent of West Side Story’s song “America,” from the 1950s musical that has themes of Puerto Rican’s struggle to survive in New York City. During this scene we also see Bad Bunny give his Grammy for Album of the Year to a young boy.

About Salsa

There are many different origin stories of who coined the term “salsa,” but the simplest and most accurate description is that it was a marketing term for Latinx music based on Afro-Cuban rhythms.[18] Salsa was born in the poor neighborhoods of the Bronx and East Harlem in the 1960s, predominantly Puerto Rican and Black communities. According to Izzy Sanabria, a renowned promoter of salsa, it is a blend of the conga and bongo drums from West Africa, the Cuban timbal and clave, the maracas, and güiro of the Taínos, the piano and base from Europe, as well as the brass from US jazz.[19] The polyrhythmic beat of the conga and the clave are the backbone of salsa.

The 60s and 70s were an era of struggle. The Young Lords, a community action group like the Black Panther Party, fought against lack of sanitation services and neglectful medical treatment. The jobs that Puerto Ricans had moved to the mainland for were gone as companies closed factories looking for cheaper labor in developing countries. White flight and redlining made it difficult for families to find adequate housing, and buildings were burning down in the Bronx as landlords attempted to recoup insurance money. The Vietnam war, the Oil Crisis and other factors led to a recession.

During this time of societal disinvestment, salsa was a form of resistance and reclaiming of humanity and joy. As Rosie Perez explains in the eighth episode of her podcast *Our Thing: The Birth of Salsa in Nueva York*, “Nowhere else except this messy, beautiful sancocho-mezcla of personalities or cultures who rose up out of their neglected barrios to say we’re here, this is us.”[20] One of the best examples of this is Willie Colon and Rubén Blades’ album *Siembra*, which provided social commentary on urban living as well as calling for pan-Latinx consciousness over a rhythm that invited joyful dancing.[21] The album was one of the many produced by Fania Records, the most successful salsa record label in history and considered the “Latin Motown.”

“Fania went all around the world, sharing the sound that pulsed with the life of New York. Like the rumble of Willie Colon’s trombone that screamed out of the projects in the South Bronx, or Larry Harlow’s piano verse which moved dancers like they were dodging midtown traffic, or Rubén Blades’ voice pushing people in the barrio high above the skyscrapers, Fania showed all of us, no matter what ghetto, apartment, home, street, suburb, city, whatever you lived in, this was urban, it was all yours to revel in.”[22]

Salsa, like hip hop, is an example of a genre of music innovated from underserved communities that expresses the daily struggles as well as the joy and humanity of the people.

Puerto Rico 1940s-1970s

To address the need for Puerto Rico to shrink the population and create jobs, the Puerto Rican government, with support from the US mainland, began Operation Bootstrap in 1947. A precursor to Section 936, it offered low-wage, tax-free, duty-free incentives for US companies to build factories on the island.[23] The US military also used Puerto Rico as a large, strategic site for their war against communism. On Vieques, a small, inhabited island of Puerto Rico, the US Navy used live ammunition, real explosives, and other chemical weapons like Agent Orange and napalm as part of their exercises.[24] They also rented out the island for militaries from other countries to use as practice.[25]

As a response to this poor treatment and lack of sovereignty, calls for independence grew. The Puerto Ricans

who wanted to be an independent country were called Nationalists, and they had lost faith that the political process would lead to successful outcomes, so they took matters into their own hands. There were multiple attempts at insurrection and violent incidents, including an assassination attempt of the sitting US president Harry Truman. The government reacted by passing the “Gag Law” in 1948 which made it a felony to encourage independence by discussing it in your home or even flying the Puerto Rican flag.[26] This began a decades-long secret surveillance operation in Puerto Rico which is now known as *Las Carpetas*.**[27]**

The US government tried to undercut the independence movement by easing the process of migrating to the mainland. US companies in the mainland were also in need of cheap factory labor. Air fare to the mainland became cheap and the government created offices in various cities to help get Puerto Ricans factory jobs and assimilate into the way of life away from the island.[28]

Operation Bootstrap was phased out in the 1970s but it was replaced by Section 963. It became the basis for a cycle that continues to this day; Puerto Rico is forced to overly rely on US corporations and billionaires using the island as a tax haven at the expense of native Puerto Ricans. We will see the next iteration of this exploitive practice when we focus on the late 20th and early 21st century history of the island.

LO QUE LE PASO A HAWAII (Minute Nine)

The camera focuses on a man wearing a pava hat (another nod to the jíbaro) playing a cuatro. The cuatro is a ten-string guitar-like instrument with Spanish origins that is the national instrument of Puerto Rico.[29] We then see Ricky Martin sitting in a white plastic chair and singing “LO QUE LE PASO A HAWAII”. The scene is symbolic of Puerto Rican life with the plastic chairs and tropical plants. Ricky Martin is a famous Puerto Rican singer from the 90s and the early 2000s who had cross-over success singing in English. He became famous while hiding his identity as a Spanish-speaking homosexual Puerto Rican. Presenting his authentic self, singing in Spanish at the Super Bowl about the US colonization, surrounded by every-day imagery of his home island is a full-circle moment.

“LO QUE LE PASO A HAWAII” has a música jíbara feel, which is Puerto Rican folk music. The music is still heard today, particularly in Christmas holiday seasons as aguinaldos, traditional Christmas folk songs. The main percussion on the album version of the song is a güiro, a thin, dried, and notched gourd that has small grooves cut into and is scraped with a puya, a metal pick. This instrument has origins from the indigenous Taínos of the island.[30]

This song is one of the most political songs on the DtMF album and is worth analyzing the lyrics closely. One of the lyrics of “LO QUE LE PASO A HAWAII” states “No, no suelte’ la bandera, ni olvide’ el lelolai,” which translates to “No, don’t let go of the flag, nor forget the lelolai.” The flag reference recalls the Gag Law of 1948 making it illegal to display the Puerto Rican flag (even in your home). The “Lelolai” references the improvised melody of música jíbara songs using the syllables la, le, lo, and lai. It’s common to continue the improvisational theme creating verses on the spot. This is so accepted there are competitions with cash prizes for high-quality performances.[31] These two lyrics provide cultural touchstones that recall the fear many Puerto Ricans feel about the continuing colonial status of the island.

This song also references Hawaii, as the title translates to “What Happened to Hawai’i.” Bad Bunny doesn’t want Puerto Rico to have a similar fate to Hawai’i, though both face similar struggles related to gentrification. The Pacific Islands became a colony of the United States around the same time and sugar was the major crop during the early twentieth century. Hawai’i became the fiftieth US state in 1959. Since then, traditional Hawaiian people and culture have declined significantly, to about twenty percent of the islands’ population in

2020[32] compared to ninety-two percent of the Puerto Rican population were born on the archipelago.[33]

Puerto Rican Status

The status of Puerto Rico is complex, but the inhabitants of the island have never had the power through government to make the decision for themselves. Throughout the last four decades of the 20th century, groups of people on the island have advocated for independence from the United States. The political process for Puerto Rican independence requires US congressional approval, and Puerto Rico has no voting representation. Despite numerous attempts, Congress has never seen independence as worthwhile to support. The ways that they have undercut the attempts have been varied but decisive. Many referendums have been voted on by Puerto Ricans with confusing and incomplete options. For example, in 1952 the options were to be a “direct colony” or “limited self-rule” with no option to become a state nor independent country. In 1967 there were three options; independence, statehood and commonwealth; however, no details on process or transition were agreed upon, and the FBI actively harassed members of the Puerto Rican Independence Party.[34] In 1989 the US Congress discussed statehood but would only consider it if it would not cost the US any money and schools would change instruction to English. Congress brought it up again in 1991, but Republican congresspeople feared adding a majority democratic population to the country. There were unofficial votes in Puerto Rico in 1993 and 1998 but no option on either ballot won a majority. A sense of voter disenfranchisement seemed to permeate the island.[35]

Puerto Ricans, through public opinion polls, have shared that the two things they value the most is the ability to maintain US citizenship and keep Spanish as the instructional language in schools. Attempts have failed to pass the Senate in 2010 and 2023 as well. However, the need to maintain Puerto Rico as a colony is not the lucrative endeavor it once was, “the United States no longer needs Puerto Rico as a colony. Possessing a foreign territory inhabited by millions of people, after all, involves huge costs of upkeep that sooner or later become a burden on the colonial administrator. As we have noted, it is easier today for US corporations to exploit laborers in the Dominican Republic or Mexico than in Puerto Rico, whose workers now enjoy the labor rights of other Americans, so the continued cost of possessing Puerto Rico can no longer be justified.”[36]

Reggaetón (Minutes Two - Four)

This scene of the performance takes place outside the pink casita, or little house. There Bad Bunny performs “Yo Perreo Sola,” “Safaera,” “Party,” and “Voy a Llevarte Pa’PR.” This colorful style of house is reminiscent of mid-twentieth century homes built on the island. The dancing and famous guests on the house porch also recall a typical house party in Puerto Rico called a “marquesina”, in which family and friends gather in the carport or garage to celebrate and be in community.[37]

As a transition to the next scene Bad Bunny falls through the roof of the casita into the house and walks out of the front door into a perrer party. (*Perreo* is the style of dancing associated with reggaeton music.) He samples three early 2000s reggaeton classics before “EoO” begins, Tego Calderón’s “Pa’Que Retozen,” Don Omar’s “Dale Don Dale,” and Daddy Yankee’s “Gasolina.”

This section of the performance is highlighting reggaeton and various aspects of the genre. While reggaeton has a reputation of misogyny and hedonism, there has always been a dynamic of resilience, resistance and joy in the genre. For example, “Yo Perreo Sola” which translates to “I dance reggaeton alone,” it is a song that empowers women to set boundaries and enjoy dancing without fear of negative attention from the male gaze. It harkens back to Ivy Queen’s “Quiero Bailar,” a song she wrote as a boundary to state “just because I dance with you doesn’t mean it will go further.” Bad Bunny has challenged reggaeton’s misogynistic, homophobic

and transphobic gender politics to be more expansive through his own gender-bending and queer friendly stances.[38]

About Reggaetón

Reggaeton's transnational origin began in Panama. Migrant workers came from Jamaica, many lured by the jobs created by the US controlled Panama Canal, and they brought their dancehall music with them. From Jamaican dancehall in Panama came reggae en español which was made popular by public transit buses called diablos rojos, or red devils. These buses were colorfully painted decommissioned school buses from the United States, and each driver wanted their own song.[39] Edgardo Franco, known as El General, was born in Panama and moved to New York City in the 1980s to study accounting.[40] In New York El General blended the dancehall of Panama, (a faster, electronic version of reggae) with hip hop.

During the beginning phase of hip hop in New York, Puerto Ricans and Jamaicans were an integral part of hip hop due to the blending of communities in the South Bronx.[41] "El General's circuitous trajectory from Panama to New York and back explains how the genre was simultaneously nurtured by Jamaican dancehall rhythms and reggae as well as the burgeoning 1980s hip hop movement in the US." [42]

The next phase of the journey takes place in Puerto Rico, where people were migrating from New York back to the island looking for better jobs and a higher quality of life. Many people on the island were inspired by hip hop, dancehall, and reggae en español coming from New York. Vico C was one of the first rappers to rap in Spanish. He was born in New York and raised in Puerto Rico. DJ Negro opened The Noise, a dance club in 1992 in the systemically under-resourced neighborhood La Perla. In that time Jamaican dancehall records had the newly released song on side A and the instrumental on side B. DJ Negro would play the instrumental while kids from the neighborhood spit bars (rap) over it. He also included hip hop instrumentals as well. This genre of music blending dancehall, reggae en español, and hip hop, became known as underground. DJ Playero was known for his mixtapes of this genre, and a teenage Daddy Yankee (who went on to become a reggaeton icon) can be heard on his mixtapes.[43] What took underground to reggaeton was the beat of a specific song, Shabba Ranks "Dembow" released in 1990. Born Rexton Rawlston Fernando Gordon in Jamaica, Shabba Ranks' beat, (called Dembow after the title of the song,) is the basis for thousands of reggaeton songs and largely defines the genre.[44]

In the 90s, reggaeton continued to grow in the caseríos, the projects of San Juan, much like hip hop exploded in the South Bronx of New York. Much like hip hop, the topics of songs reflected the lives of young people, partying and economic desires. As Ivy Queen stated, "to be honest, I will admit it, there were some lyrics back in the 90s that took it a little bit far... We weren't inciting people to do anything. We were just expressing the world we came from." [45]

During the early 90s while reggaeton was growing it was not played on the radio. And once it became more popular in the late 90s it became a target of La Mano Dura (strong hand against crime), a government crackdown on the war on crime where the US National Guard was utilized to control and contain crime.[46] "One of our favorite topics to rap about in those days were the police. And the police back then were really bad, unos abusadores (bullies). If you were young, poor and dark skinned, forget about it. They do whatever they wanted to do to you. And there were a lot of corrupt cops too, so we rapped about the abuse and how much we hated them." [47]

Fruity Loops, (now FL studios), a digital music making tool was released in 1997, progressed reggaeton into another evolution. It allowed artist to not only sample songs or create music in the studio but to use a home

computer to create new music. Francisco “Luny” Saldaña and Victor “Tunes” Cabrera, two Dominicans worked in a cafeteria at Harvard during the day and made beats on Fruity Loops at night. The producing duo called themselves Luny Tunes. Luny Tunes brought their Dominican heritage through the music by adding Bachata touches like the guitar.[48] DJ Nelson, CEO of a reggaeton label Flow Music brought Luny Tunes to Puerto Rico. Together Luny Tunes along with fellow producer Noriega created *Más Flow*, which catapulted the genre into the mainstream and commercialization.[49]

Luny Tunes helped produce some of the songs on Tego Calderon’s first album, *El Abayarde*. Tego Calderon was proud of his Afro-Caribbean heritage and was a socially conscious artist. Ivy Queen described him as “super political, pro black, and he was dope.”[50] Soon after Luny Tunes produced “Gasolina” by Daddy Yankee (Ramón Luis Ayala Rodríguez), which would launch reggaeton into the mainstream. Throughout the next decade the genre would spread and grow, including a time where there was a New York radio station, La Kalle, that played only reggaeton.[51]

Puerto Rico 1970s-2013

At this point in Puerto Rican history the two major political parties are the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP), and the pro-commonwealth/territory Popular Democratic Party (PPD). They would swap control of the government like Democrats and Republicans do in the US. There is a third party that is pro-independence, the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), but it has a much lower percentage of the votes than the other two.

During the 1970s some of those Puerto Ricans who migrated to the mainland moved back to the island due to the US recession.[52] To spark the economy, the government made loopholes for US corporations to benefit from exploiting Puerto Rican labor. Section 936 of the Tax Reform Act of 1976 allowed companies working in Puerto Rico to not pay taxes on profits. During the first ten years of the program, it brought a net of 20,000 jobs and more than 100 of the Fortune 500 companies had Puerto Rico subsidiaries.[53] Puerto Ricans, being US citizens, demanded safe working conditions and fair wages, which caused “many US firms to sour on the “Puerto Rican miracle.” Companies decided to move to other Caribbean countries, preferring to pay tariffs for lower labor costs.[54] “Puerto Rico set the mold for a trend that then repeated itself throughout the Caribbean region for two generations: American corporations moved in and set up low-wage factories, the factories drew laborers to the cities from the impoverished countryside, the migrants came in greater numbers than the jobs available, and the surplus workers began leaving for the United States, either as contract laborers or as unauthorized immigrants.”[55] Section 936 was phased out in 2005, exacerbating the island’s debt crisis and economic decline.

The 80s and 90s were dominated politically by the PNP. The island was reliant on multinational corporations using section 936 tax exemption loophole, but it wasn’t enough to make a dent in the growing debt the archipelago was incurring. Neoliberal ideologies encouraged the government to shrink, which led to many schools being closed, government employees being laid off, while health care and the telephone company were privatized.

These drastic changes were met with resistance from the many people it impacted, which led to a rise in extreme violence against students, protestors and other pro-independent nationalists by the government. This was in addition to the criminalization of poverty through “Mano Dura” policing policy and the use of the National Guard to raid and occupy housing projects.[56]

The cherry on top of these draconian measures was the constant scandals and government corruption. Over

eighty people in Pedro Rosselló's administration in the 90s were accused of, convicted on, or imprisoned on corruption charges.[57] In 2008 Governor Acevedo Vilá was running for a second term when he was charged with twenty-four federal counts of corruption. His opponent, Luis G. Fortuño won and, in his words, gave Puerto Rico a bitter pill—more austerity measures. His successor Governor Padilla continued the downward spiral by privatizing the airport, then declaring a fiscal emergency where he reduced benefits, froze wages and limited collective bargaining.

US corporations were using Puerto Rico as a tax haven and only offering low wages while Puerto Ricans were treated as second class citizens with minimal ability to use the democratic voting process to change their futures. The island borrowed large sums due to the institutional barriers that made access to resources expensive and scarce. Elite politicians in both major parties were embroiled in scandals while simultaneously enacting severe austerity measures to address the fiscal crisis that decimated public services to a largely impoverished population. And they criminalized the poor "tough on crime" policies.

While there is much to lament, these austerity measures did not stop people from voicing their frustrations and protesting for improvements. It is in this social and political context Ivy Queen said "We weren't inciting people to do anything. We were just expressing the world we came from." [58] From 2010-2011 students at the University of Puerto Rico were on strike most of the academic year. At every phase in the cyclical nature of colonial oppression occurring on the island Puerto Ricans have reminded us through protest and art that they are here, and they deserve better.

Bomba and Plena (Minute Nine to the end)

Behind Ricky Martin we see electric poles spark and jíbaros swinging from the poles. This represents the broken power grid that has been inadequate on the island for decades. After Hurricane Maria in 2017 many on the island were without power for many months, the longest blackout in the history of the US. With the government failing to address the crisis, people of the island climbed up the poles and tried to fix the electricity themselves, as the jíbaros dancing on the poles represent. This is the start of Bad Bunny's next song, "El Apagón," which translates to "Blackout."

Bad Bunny appears on the screen in the field with the Puerto Rican flag (again the light blue that symbolizes independence) we hear the beat on the barril drums of bomba, a genre of Puerto Rican music with strong African influences.

About Bomba

Bomba has a rich history in Puerto Rico. It was developed in the 1600s by enslaved Africans, in fact, the word bomba loosely translates to "drum" in the West African languages of Akan and Ashanti. There are at least two drums in bomba, the *buleador*, lower drum, and the lead drum called a *bomba* or *primo*. [59] The drums are made from wooden barrels. Another key aspect of bomba is the dancer in the center of the *batey*, the dance space. Wearing a long flowy skirt the dancer leads the performance as an improvisational conversation with the lead drummer. The practice of gathering around a bomba is called a *Bámbula* and is focused on connecting to a shared humanity meant for healing. *Bámbulas* told stories, shared news, and communicated revolts. The use of bombas as resistance continues to this day, showing up in Black Lives Matter protests as well as Bad Bunny's song about the failure of the government's ability to provide adequate infrastructure on the island. [60]

The use of bomba drums in a song protesting the divestment of public infrastructure brings a centuries-old

Afro-Carib cultural practice to our modern context. This is an example of how Bad Bunny connects the old to the new. Additionally, he layers positivity with negativity, singing about how great Puerto Rico is while simultaneously complaining about the blackouts.

About Plena

From the top of one of the electric poles Bad Bunny begins “CAFÉ CON RON,” a song celebrating Puerto Rican culture. “CAFÉ CON RON”’s has roots in plena music.

Plena was developed in Puerto Rico at the turn of the 20th century in working-class Afro-Puerto-Rican neighborhoods. The instruments are smaller than bomba, with hand-held drums panderetas or panderos that look a bit like large tambourines. While there is singing in bomba, a key aspect of plena is the call and response of the vocals, inviting community to participate (which you hear in “CAFÉ CON RON”). Plena was often used to share news and was even referred to as the singing newspaper. Plena songs told stories, shared histories and were part of Puerto Rican’s strong history of protesting for improved quality of life on the island.[61]

Puerto Rican History from the 2015- present

The US restrictions and exploitations of Puerto Rico mean that the island’s economy continues to struggle. When the tax loophole Section 936 ended in 2005, manufacturing jobs dropped from 112,000 to 73,000, 35 percent, between 2006-2016. In 2015 Puerto Rican Governor Alejandro García Padilla stated that Puerto Rico could not pay its \$72 billion dollar debt. The debt came from Wall Street loans and illegal bonds. If Puerto Rico was an independent nation they could have sought a bailout through the International Monetary Fund. If it was a state, it could have used Chapter 9 bankruptcy protections. However, being a territory of the United States, it could not have these supports and systems. Instead, President Obama enacted the PROMESA bill in 2016, which created a seven-person board to decide how to restructure the island’s finances. Members of the board were appointed by the president, and only two needed to be from Puerto Rico or have business there. Furthermore, Puerto Rico was responsible for paying for the work of the board. The board closed schools, slashed public employee benefits, cut pensions by 10%, reduced cost in health care and police, doubled tuition for the state university while cutting the budget and privatized electricity.[62]

Hurricane Maria in 2017 kicked Puerto Rico when it was already down. Originally the death toll stated by President Trump a month after the disaster was sixteen, then the official count rose to sixty-four in the following months. However, according to a report published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in July 2018, “our estimate of 4,645 excess deaths...is likely to be conservative.”[63] Power outages were the longest in US history, lasting seven months for twenty-two thousand people. Even now the power grid is unreliable. Many people migrated to the mainland while “federal funds for Puerto Rico’s rebuilding quickly turned into a cesspool of corruption and waste that enriched politically connected US firms.”[64] Puerto Rican officials tried working with the US government for money for reconstruction, however a tiny fraction was ever actually provided.[65]

The reliance on US corporations and billionaires recycle again through Act 60 in 2019, which builds from previous incentives to bring US money to the island to the detriment of residents.[66] The post-Maria tourism displaces long-time residence because the landlord can make one hundred dollars a night on a short-term rental when the previous tenant was paying three hundred a month.[67] In the documentary *Aquí Vive Gente* Bianca Graulau “makes an explicit comparison between the tourist economy and Puerto Rico’s historical plantation economies, pointing out that in both cases, it is the wealthy Americans who have become richer

while the Puerto Rican laborers and residents remain impoverished and exploited.”[68]

Frustration over the perpetually inadequate infrastructure of the island boiled over during the summer of 2019, in what is now called El Verano Boricua. Leaked chats between Governor Ricardo Rosselló and eleven other men were misogynistic, homophobic, vulgar, crude as well as included the illegal sharing of government information. Puerto Ricans responded with massive protests which lead to the Governor and a dozen other officials to resign.[69]

Puerto Ricans are looking down a future where there is no end to the austerity. Hope in building a stronger, supportive infrastructure that meets the needs of the people on the island is hard to find when it will take forty years to pay off debt. Juan Gonzalez summarizes the history of colonization succinctly when he says “the colonial status of Puerto Rico turned the island, with its combination of duty-free trade, low wages, and tax loopholes, into a corporate oasis unlike any other in the world. At the same time, the federal government was forced to spend billions annually in federal welfare and transfer payments to alleviate the island-wide poverty these very corporations perpetuated.”[70] Throughout the generations of the 20th century and even today, the United States has created a Puerto Rico that maximize exploits for companies while minimize support for the people who live in the community.

Conclusion

At the end of the performance, we see the flags of Caribbean and Latin American countries appear and Bad Bunny names many after he says “God Bless América,” a strategic statement to show that all these countries are considered “American.” The crowd behind him are playing traditional plena instruments, güiros and panderetas. He ends the song with the phrase “seguimos aquí,” which was used in the previously mentioned short film *DeBí TiRAR Más FOTos*. It translates to “we continue to stay here,” which references his desire to stay in Puerto Rico and recognizes that many people from the previously named countries are in the US and positively contribute to our communities. The football that he holds supports this statement with the phrase “Together, We Are America.”

Bad Bunny performed for thirteen minutes in the most watched TV event of the year in the US.[71] He sang in Spanish and performed songs created from multiple genres of music. These genres are cultural products created by marginalized groups of Puerto Ricans and the lyrics express a critique of the colonial abuse the island has faced while also uplifting the rich cultural history of his home. Despite the fiscal crisis and perpetual issues facing the island he joyfully and seamlessly showcases the beauty and richness of the archipelago. His art is resistance and a remembering that fights back the relentless colonial-rooted attacks that continue to exploit the island's resources at great cost to the inhabitants on the island. By uplifting the history and culture of Puerto Rico he invites us not just to appreciate it but to preserve it as well.

Teaching Strategies

I plan for this unit to take about three weeks, which would roughly equate to fifteen classes, each forty-three minutes. Before this unit students have completed previous lessons exploring their identity through an identify map. They will also have had a few foundational lessons about the geography of the Americas which include explorations of the terms Latin America and Hispanic. I will also be seeking to connect to songs that they have

shared with me during a beginning of year get-to-know-you “class playlist” activity. This background knowledge lays an important foundation for them to be able to draw connections to their lives and see patterns through various stories.

To help students draw out key ideas, themes and connections between Puerto Rico and music I suggest using Project Zero Thinking Routines (henceforth shortened to PZTR) to analyze text, images, videos or songs. Thinking routines are a set of questions or a brief sequence of steps that teachers utilize to support and scaffold students thinking about the content.[72] While thinking routines can be done individually, I found them most powerful when students share their thinking with each other and then the instructor. This allows students to draw on their peers’ ideas while also enabling the teacher to thread the needle of themes and key takeaways.

To help students acquire vocabulary necessary to understand the topics discussed in this unit I suggest using a Frayer Model vocabulary chart. Frayer Models are a graphic organizer that increases language acquisition.[73]

As part of this unit, consider providing guided notes sheets that students fill in to help retain information from each lesson. I also suggest two large class visuals. A large map of the Western Hemisphere could be posted in the class. As you explain each genre, draw a line from each geographical location that influences the genre. Use different colors of markers for each genre. At the end of the unit the poster will be a visual representation of the transnational connections created by these genres of music. You could also post a large timeline, where, as each decade of Puerto Rican history is taught, you can place key events on the timeline to create a sense of chronology and to make patterns more evident.

I will use political cartoons from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth to showcase how the United States viewed Puerto Rico at the time. This is a prime opportunity to illustrate the problematic view the US has historically had regarding Puerto Rico.



Figure 1 “Will Wear the Stars and Stripes” Illustrated by Charles Lewis Bartholomew and published May 7, 1898, in the Minneapolis Journal.



Figure 2 “What the United States Has Fought For” Political Cartoon from the Chicago Tribune, 1914.



Figure 3 “How Some Apprehensive People Picture Uncle Sam after the War” Detroit News, 1898.

The flow of the lessons will follow the order of the background information presented above, with the information chunked by sections of the performance, the genre of music on display and related history.

Students will spend one class period analyzing the lyrics to “LO QUE LE PAS´O A HAWAII” We will structure our discussion using the PZTR “The 4 Cs” connecting the lyrics to what we have learned about Puerto Rico, Challenging ideas, positions or assumptions brought up in the text, identifying concepts (this will be a great time to review key vocabulary term), and changes in attitudes, thinking or actions.

As a culminating project students will have an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in one of four

ways.

1. A political cartoon about the conditions of Puerto Rico
2. A letter to a senator about the conditions of Puerto Rico
3. Ability to write a song or poem about the impact of colonization, gentrification and privatization on a community.

Students will engage in a gallery walk to review their peers' products, and the product will be graded on the IB Communication rubric.

Classroom Activities

Day 1 - Watch the first two minutes of the Superbowl half-time show and have students complete the "See Think Wonder" PZTR. Have students share out and use their wonderings to create a list of questions that relate to Puerto Rico. (You could also lead students in the "Creative Questions" PZTR.)

Day 2 - Start with the "321 Bridge" PZTR (this will be referenced at the end of the unit so collect these papers or tell students to keep them). Introduce the history in the section *Puerto Rico from the Taínos to the 1930s*. Complete an exit ticket like a true/false to check for understanding.

Day 3 - Review two or three political cartoons with the "Looking: Ten Times Two" PZTR. Complete Frayer Model graphic organizers for key vocabulary terms such as colonization, gentrification, migration, jíbaro, cuatro, güiro, commonwealth etc.

Day 4 - Watch minutes four through nine of the Superbowl half-time show. With guided notes discuss the information in the *About Salsa* section. Complete an exit ticket like a three-question multiple choice quiz to check for understanding.

Day 5 - Start the class by reviewing the transnational journey of salsa creation on the large map posted in the classroom. Use a specific color to identify salsa. Draw a line connecting West Africa to Cuba and another to Puerto Rico. Draw another line from Cuba and Puerto Rico to New York City, and draw a line between Cuba and Puerto Rico. With guided notes introduce the history in the section *Puerto Rico 1940s - 1970s*. Have students complete the "Word Phrase Sentence" PZTR and share out answers.

Day 6 - Create a graphic organizer with the lyrics to "LO QUE LE PASO A HAWAII" in Spanish and English as well as a third blank column. Play the song without any visuals and have students follow along. Then play it again and invite students to draw what they see happening in the stanza. Ask questions like "What do you think Bad Bunny means here?" "What message do you think he's trying to tell us?" Review the Frayer Model vocabulary charts of gentrification and colonization. Watch Ricky Martin's performance of "LO QUE LE PASO A HAWAII" around minute nine. Explain the significance of the cuatro. Ask students if they have new ideas or thoughts based on the performance of the song and how it relates to the message.

Day 7 - Introduce the information in the *Puerto Rican Status* section. Have students take guided notes and complete the "Four Cs" PZTR and share out answers.

Day 8 - Watch minutes two through four of the Superbowl half-time show. Introduce the information in the *About Reggaetón* section with guided notes. Complete an exit ticket like a three-question short answer quiz to check for understanding.

Day 9 - Start the class by reviewing the transnational journey of reggaeton creation on the posted map in the classroom. Use a specific color to identify reggaeton, different than the one chosen for salsa. Draw a line connecting Jamaica, Panama, New York City, and Puerto Rico. You could also include a line from the Dominican Republic to Boston to Puerto Rico and another from Puerto Rico to Colombia. With guided notes discuss the history in the section *Puerto Rico 1980s - 2014*. Have students complete the "Headlines" PZTR and share out answers.

Day 10 - Watch minutes ten through the end of the Superbowl half-time show. Introduce the information in the *About Bomba* and *About Plena* sections. Watch the video "Why Puerto Rican Bomba Music Is Resistance" and have students complete the "Values, Identities and Actions" PZTR.

Day 11- Start the class by reviewing the transnational journey of bomba and plena creation on the large, posted map in the classroom. Use different colored markers to identify each one. Introduce the information in the *Puerto Rican History from the 2015 - today* section with guided notes. Have students complete the "I used to think... Now I think..." PZTR and share out answers.

Day 12 - Review the map as a class. Watch the Superbowl half-time show in its entirety. An option for more advanced students could be to have them complete the "Layers" PZTR as they re-watch the halftime show. Have students reference their "321 Bridge" PZTR activity they did at the start of the unit. Have students complete the "After Learning" portion along with the "Bridge" part. Have students share their new thinking with three peers. Introduce the culminating project.

Day 13 and 14 - Work on culminating project

Day 15 - Present culminating projects in small groups or a gallery walk.

Resources

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<https://youtu.be/3RGqiGHWDrQ?si=9Gnm7gmeqIBqjg2F>.

A student friendly video about *bomba*.

Casanova-Burgess, Alana. 2021. *La Brega*. Futuro Studios, February 24. Podcast.

<https://futurostudios.org/podcasts/la-brega/>.

Three seasons of a bilingual podcast episodes that touch on different aspects of life in Puerto Rico.

Díaz, Vanessa. 2026. "Bad Bunny Super Bowl Halftime Show Explained: Meanings, Symbols."

In *Rolling Stone*. Rolling Stone. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-latin/bad-bunnysuper-bowl-meaning-1235513218/>.

A great explanation of the cultural references of the halftime show.

Díaz, Vanessa, and Petra Rivera-Rideau. n.d. "Bad Bunny Syllabus." In

Www.Badbunnysyllabus.Com. Accessed July 31, 2026. <https://www.badbunnysyllabus.com/>.

This website is full of articles and context to use to prepare for a study of Bad Bunny including lyrics to many songs in Spanish and English.

Díaz, Vanessa, and Petra R Rivera-Rideau. 2026. *P Fkn R*. Duke University Press.

A recent book that explains many aspects of Bad Bunny's Puerto Rican cultural representation.

Great background knowledge for educators.

Gonzalez, Juan. (2012) 2022. *Harvest of Empire : A History of Latinos in America* . Second. Penguin Books.

A comprehensive book that details the impact of the United States policy on it's southern neighbors in the Western Hemisphere. Great background knowledge for educators.

Graulau, Bianca. 2022. "Aquí Vive Gente." *Rimas Entertainment*.

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A Spanish documentary about modern displacement and gentrification in Puerto Rico.

Harvard Graduate School of Education. 2022. "PZ's Thinking Routines Toolbox | Project Zero."

Pz.Harvard.Edu, Harvard Graduate School of Education. <https://pz.harvard.edu/thinkingroutines>.

This website houses all the Project Zero Thinking Routines and can be sorted by category and subject.

Meléndez-Badillo, Jorell. 2024. *Puerto Rico: A National History*. First edition. Princeton University Press.

A comprehensive book that details the history of Puerto Rico. Great background knowledge for educators.

Moore, Robin D. 2010. *Music in the Hispanic Caribbean : Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. Oxford University Press.

Helpful text for teachers that want to dive more into other genres of music in the Caribbean.

NFL. 2026. "Bad Bunny's Apple Music Super Bowl Halftime Show." YouTube, February 8.

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The video of Bad Bunny's Super Bowl Halftime Show used in the timing of this document.

Queen, Ivy. 2025. *Loud: The History of Reggaeton*. Futuro Studios, September 15. Podcast.

<https://futurostudios.org/podcasts/loud-the-history-of-reggaeton/>.

A ten-episode podcast about the history of reggaeton. Great background knowledge for educators.

Rosie, Perez. 2026. "Our Thing: The Birth of Salsa in Nueva York Archives - Futuro Studios."

Futuro Studios. Futuro Media Group. Podcast. <https://futurostudios.org/podcasts/our-thing/>.

An eight-episode podcast about the history of salsa. Great background knowledge for educators.

Sanabria, Izzy. 2014. "What Is Salsa?" *YouTube*.

<https://youtu.be/DhV5Hf0oHnc?si=PeKooxJlJlRx-n0>.

Short clip of Izzy Sanabria explaining the origin and cultural melting pot of salsa instrumentalization.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Economics

- 2.6-8.A Explain the flow of goods, services, and resources in an economy.
- 3.3-5.H Identify unintended consequences of market activities (e.g., pollution, noise, traffic).

History

- 1.6-B Explain and analyze historical sources
- 4.6-C Identify and explain how continuity and change has affected belief systems, commerce and industry, innovations, settlement patterns, social organizations, transportation and women's roles in world history

Civics

- 3.6-C Explain how government actions affect citizens' daily lives.
- 4.6-C Describe the governments of the countries bordering the United States and their relationships with the United States.
- 4.6-D. Describe the processes that resulted in a treaty or agreement between the United States and another nation-state.
- 4.6-E Explain how nations work together on common environmental problems, natural disasters and trade.

English

- 1.3.7.B Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what a literary text says explicitly, as well as any inferences, conclusions, and generalizations drawn from it

Notes

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