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“QUÍTATE TÚ PA’ PONERME YO”: AN ANALYSIS OF
LATIN MUSIC AS AN EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY IN THE
UNITED STATES

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Abstract

This analysis focus on the connection between Hispanic Caribbean music and identity in the Latino community that lives in the U.S. territory. In this paper, it has been employed as the main sources of information the Latino artists themselves with their songs, videos, cover albums, and interviews. All of these along with the diverse articles from experts in the topic have made possible the creation of this analysis. To understand the significant role that these music genres have in this group, it is divided into four sections apart from the introduction and conclusion. Firstly, it has been made a short retelling of the reasons that caused the wave migrations in the 20th century to understand why this phenomenon began in these particular areas and time. Secondly, I analyze how Latin music evolves in the States to express the feeling that many people from the next generation of immigrants feel. Thirdly, the concept of a pan-Latino identity is also explored in relation to how it has been affected by the Hispanic Caribbean genres that have been created in the mainland. Lastly, I focus on the possible whitewashing that can be suffering this music nowadays due to it is relevance around the world. With this analysis, I express the importance that music has for the expression of identity especially in a diasporic situation, and how this new *boom* of Latin music can provide a new perspective about the Latino community in the United States.

Introduction

In the last few decades, Latin music has conquered the world. Countries, where Spanish is not the official language, are consuming and enjoying these rhythms to the point that these songs are in their top 10 lists. Reggaeton and *trap español* are some of the Latin urban genres that are the most listened around the globe and, therefore, they have attracted the interest of many scholars to understand this new phenomenon. In this paper, I focus on the reason why these genres are having such success in the music industry due to how they work as a way to express the Latino and American identity for the Latino community in the United States. Its development through the last decades until nowadays gives the opportunity of analyzing these urban and some traditional genres as revindication of identity through its rhythms and lyrics. Moreover, there is an analysis of how the American market and population have reacted to this success and about the controversies about a possible whitewashing that have appeared in the last years.

‘Latin music’ will be a term mostly employed to encapsulate all Hispanic Caribbean genres. As stated above, the focus of this text is analyzing the interconnection between music and identity and the genres that have more influence in this have come from the Caribbean islands or have been highly influenced by them. The reason to choose these genres and not others is due to how they created a revolution in the perception of this type of music in all Latinos. I have decided to employ the term ‘Latin’ instead of ‘Caribbean’ because how these musical styles have been perceived as a relevant representation of the whole Latin community. They are ‘Caribbean music’, because they use Caribbean rhythms, were created by Caribbean artists or in the Caribbean islands; however, it has been decided to denominate them as ‘Latin music’ to clarify that these were or are the mainstream representatives of the Hispanic communities in the United States and around the world.

This analysis has focused on studying the production of many different Latin artists. The reason to choose this method is that it offers the opportunity of studying this topic from the perspective of the community affected. Videos, music and texts has been used in order to gather more information about artists and individuals that took or take part in these movements. In this particular case, it has had special– relevance what the rhythms and lyrics are telling; therefore, I am mentioning many songs as evidence. The main resource of information will be the testimonies of the artists and songs, but the use of the press or some cultural and musical analyses that explore this topic will be important to provide data to the study.

Lastly, it will be clarified that some of the themes of this text continue to develop at this time. This can provoke that in a short period of time some of the information collected here can be outdated. The case of the urban genres is very recent; therefore, some of the conclusions and data that can be presented may differ from future analyses about this topic. If some of the details exposed in this document can be considered incorrect in the time to come, it is due to the changes that are taking place currently in the industry.

1. Hispanic Caribbean Migration

The history of the United States cannot be told without mentioning the word ‘immigrants.’ The country was created after a massive migration from England, which makes its first citizens ‘immigrants’. This connection of the States with migration is something that has made the country what it is nowadays. The multiculturalism that can be observed in their culture has been caused by many migration waves experienced throughout time. Many communities from all around the world have decided to move to America looking for an improvement in their lives. One of the largest communities in the country is Latinos. Due to the geographical closeness, the Latin community corresponded

to 18.5% of the population of the country in 2019 (United States Census Bureau, "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States."). Certainly, Latinos are an indispensable part of the society of the United States. Though many different countries are enclosed in this group Hispanic Caribbean countries are usually at the top of the list. If we look at the graphic of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) on the U.S. immigrants' population by country of birth 1960-2018 and compare all the Hispanic countries, it can be observed how Cuba and the Dominican Republic are in the third and fourth position respectively¹. Puerto Rico does not appear in the graphics, but it is "the second-largest Hispanic origin population living in the United States" after Mexicans (López and Patten). To understand the evolution of Latin culture and music in the States, it is necessary to know about their backgrounds.

The East Coast has three of the cities with a higher number of Caribbean immigrants. These areas are Miami, Chicago, and New York; and each one had a Hispanic population larger than two million in their areas in 2010-2018 (Frey). Most of the individuals of the Latino communities that live there came from the three Hispanic islands from the Caribbean: Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic.

In the case of New York, Cordero-Guzman in his article "The Latino Population in New York City" comments that it is estimated that the Latin population is "about 2.5 million persons" and that "this population is largely comprised of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, each making up about 29% of the Latino population and together represent close to half the Latinos in New York City". Most of this huge migration began in the 20th century. Something similar happened in Miami, where 68.5% of the population is Hispanic (United States Census Bureau, "Miami-Dade County, Florida Census."). Moreover, Chicago since the first wave of Latino migration to the States has seen how the Hispanic population in the area has suffered an exponential growth (Paral, et al.).

1. See Figure 1 and Figure 2 in Appendix.

The arrival of immigrants to the mainland started in the second half of the 20th century; nevertheless, the case of Puerto Rico is different from the other islands of the Caribbean. The Puerto Rican migration started with the instauration of the Jones Act in 1920, which granted U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans (Gutiérrez, 112). Until this moment, Puerto Rico was considered by the Government of the U.S. as an “unincorporated territory” (Gutiérrez, 111) and its citizens did not possess the same rights as an American citizen. This change in the law offered the opportunity of migrating to the country and to have free movement through all the territory of the United States. After the Great Depression, there was an increase in the migration to New York. Gutierrez establishes that the reasons for this movement were caused by the colonial economy of the island, which did not provide enough to the population and, due to this, many decided to move to the United States. There was a rapid increment of Puerto Rican immigrants to New York during and after the Second World War because of the lack of work that citizens suffered on the island. Although things have changed since that time, it is still being a problem with the high rate of unemployment and continues to be one of the causes of the constant migration from this island to the mainland.

On the other hand, a new wave of migration from the Hispanic Caribbean started mainly in the ‘60s. The population that lived in those places decided to leave their homeland with the fall of the dictatorships of Batista in Cuba and Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. Unlike Puerto Ricans, these groups moved to the United States because of political reasons. These political changes in the Caribbean, along with the change in the Immigration and National Act in 1965 by the U.S. Government, which offered visas for family unification, allowed many groups to leave their country and move to the mainland.

In Cuba after the success of Castro's revolution, the citizens decided to leave their homes to move to the States in 1959; later on, in 1965, due to a civil war in the Dominican Republic, a large number of citizens left the country. The first arrival of immigrants of Cubans and Dominicans to the States was mostly people from the upper class that decided to move to the U.S. territory politically overdriven and for the possible economical changes that would overtake in their homeland (Duany). However, that changed and, eventually, the decision to move to the States as part of the idea of looking for an improvement in their lives. Dominicans' decision to leave the land was motivated as a reaction to "(1) the manner in which the Dominican state- building project was managed and (2) the living conditions of vast segments of the population." (Krohn-Hansen, 34). The change in their countries' economies created an impoverishment in the population, which led to the immigration of many individuals. The ongoing political issues and the economic malaise in the following decades only made that the constant exodus of the Dominicans would continue. Cuban migrations have had four waves since 1959 and 1991; and each of them was provoked by different historical moments, such as the Mariel boatlift. All of them were caused by problems with Castro's government and economic policies that provoked that people from the middle and middle-lower class to abandon the island. In both islands, there has been a continued migration to the United States due to the politics and economic problems that can be found nowadays in the countries.

The Hispanic Caribbean migrations have always been caused by the economical and political issues in their homeland. The migrations wave in the last century made many Latinos settle in the mainland, which led them to raise their children and families in the mainland. This decision will provoke the musical revolution of the Latin genres thanks to the many immigrants and Latino born in the U.S..

2. Music and Identity: Diasporic Themes in Latin Music

I'm too Latin for hip-hop and too hip-hop for Latin

'Til y'all figure it out I'ma keep rappin'

-Pitbull, "The Truth (Interlude)" (2007)

Many Latinos have been living in the States for decades. They have made their lives in this country, which has led to a new generation of Latinos born in the States far away from their fathers or grandparents' homeland. This youth has lived most of their lives in the United States and their approach to their roots has been made only by the cultural representation that was present in their families or *barrios*. Their mixed background made this next generation change the perspective of Latin identity, which was most connected to this idea of being Latino and American. Their exposure to this duality created a new vision of their identity as Latino because it has been formed under the influence of the Anglo world.

According to ACP (Observatory on Migration), "culture and music are privileged transmission channels of diasporic identities." (6). Diaspora in music is expressed in many ways. It can be shown through the rhythms or the lyrics. To be able to define Latin urban Music as a representation of diaspora, it is necessary to analyze different elements presented in the music or even in the visual media that appear in the videos or the album arts.

2.1. Expression of Latin Identity through Music

Many Latinos have not seen the countries of their progenitors but have felt this connection between them and their roots. Latinos usually lived in a neighborhood where there was a huge Latin community, especially in cities like New York during the migration's waves in the second half of the 20th century (Kronh-Hansen, 45 - 46). These areas made it easier for the Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans to express themselves and, therefore, their culture. Some part of their traditions and culture continued to be part of their lives, and among these it was music.

Music has been always a good method to bring part of your culture when you leave your homeland, along with language. Popular and traditional songs helped them to remember their country. They brought closer to the first generation of immigrants their homelands and helped to calm a little bit their feelings of homesickness. The next generation of Latinos would connect these melodies only to their parents' generation. They have never been to these countries and, therefore, their songs would not express these feelings of nostalgia. Marc Anthony expresses this feeling in an interview: "I never thought I would sing in Spanish. Being born and raised in New York, I'd never ever ever ever. That was my dad's music, that was old people music" ("Marc Anthony - Cómo Comencé a Tocar Salsa - Nuestra Herencia, Pandora.", 1.34 – 1.42). Nevertheless, this first rejection towards Latin music changed and many artists decided to embrace these melodies as part of their heritage, helping to reinforce their identity in the American world and to create a connection between them and their roots.

Popular songs, part of this Hispanic tradition, were always playing in the neighborhoods. Willie Colón makes reference to this in "Nueva York" from his album *Solo*,

Nueva York, selva de concreto,

Mi corazón guarda el secreto,

En tus barrios latinos

Yo vi por primera vez

Las tradiciones de mis abuelos.

Marc Anthony remembers how many different styles of music could be heard in the streets, creating what he calls a “melting pot” (“Marc Anthony - Cómo Comencé a Tocar Salsa - Nuestra Herencia, Pandora.”, 0.57). Many people from the next generation of immigrants would be familiar with the songs and, in the end, it will these songs made possible the connection between generations. Marc Anthony, inspired by a song by Juan Gabriel (“Marc Anthony - Cómo Comencé a Tocar Salsa - Nuestra Herencia, Pandora.”, 1.57 – 2.18), started to make salsa and reinforce his identity as part of the Latino community. He, years later, would do a version of the song “Lamento Borincano” by Rafael Hernández Marín, where he adds a few lines to express his attachment for Puerto Rico: “Yo soy hijo de borinquen y eso nadie lo va a cambiar / Y el día en que yo me muera, en ti quiero descansar / Yo te adoro Puerto Rico, y eso nadie me lo va a quitar, eh.” This is not the only song that this singer uses to reinforce Puerto Rican music tradition in his career; however, these new verses that he decided to create for his version shows how much Puerto Rico means to him. He declares that he would like to be buried on the island and how he loves it. The fact that he added these lines in this particular song, which was originally written to talk about the impoverishment of Puerto Rico in 1929, is very interesting. Hernández Marín made this song to talk about the economic crisis that caused the first wave of migrations of Puerto Ricans to the States, and Marc Anthony decided to express his interest in his roots with it. He is not alone, because Romeo Santos in the first song “Intro” of his last album *Utopia* starts saying “Dominicano soy” (I am

Dominican), which establishes since the beginning the feelings of this singer to the island. These types of statements have a big relevance due to how these personalities want to declare their identity through music.

Many artists nowadays want to reclaim their identity as part of the community through their music by using Latin rhythms, for example, “I like it” by Cardi B featuring Bad Bunny and J Balvin which is a fusion of salsa and *trap* with the chorus based in the song “I like it like that” by Pete Rodriguez. Nevertheless, one of the most important characteristics which help to be connected to the Latin society is language. According to D. Hernández, “language, even when the musical aesthetics are heavily indebted to R&B and hip-hop, is clearly an equally powerful way of constructing distinctions—and dividing lines—between Latin and non-Latin urban music and culture.” (1043). This concept of language as a division between what is Latin or what is not has divided the American market. Many Latino artists, if they want to appeal to the Anglo audience, will make their song in English and even change the musical style to adapt their music. Aventura is the best example of this, they were recognized around the world by their hit “Obsesión”, which is a bachata in Spanish. However, the English version, “Obsesion - English Remix, Album Version”, made by the group takes another direction. It has a clear influence of hip-hop and rap and the lyrics is in English apart from some phrases and the chorus. This version was made to target the American audience by replacing the distinguished rhythms of bachata and changing the language for English. This version also appealed to the Latinos with these mixes of melodies and languages. Latin groups that live in the States unlike the Anglos have no problem enjoying music with English lyrics or Spanish, due to how they are connected to both worlds.

The next generations of Latinos did not feel the same attachment to the land as their parents and the music did not feel part of their identity at first. Nevertheless, this

same music that they rejected was what made them approach their roots. The language and rhythms are part of the representation of what it means to be Latino and, therefore, the inclusion of these elements in music makes it easily recognizable to identify this as a feature of the Latin community.

2.2. Afro-American and Anglo Influences in Latinos

As Quintero Rivera mentions in *Migration, Ethnicity, and Interactions between the United States and Hispanic Caribbean Popular Culture*, it cannot be visualized the interactions between Latin America and the United States as a dichotomy but as a “result of shared or intertwined historical and cultural processes” (83). This statement expresses perfectly how Latin music has been always in contact with diverse cultures that are present in the States and how they have influenced each other. It is hard to specify the first time Latin music came in contact with the American genres; however, this musical connection between the two cultures can be analyzed if it is taken into consideration the first Latin group became famous in the United States.

Machito and his Afro-Cubans was a revolution on many levels in the American country and showed the world a new way to experience music. According to Gottlieb, they were the band that created a new sound mixing Jazz and Latin rhythms, which was called Latin Jazz. They revolutionized the music scene in the States during the decade of the '40s. Their success, due to their creation of Latin Jazz, caused a change in the perception of the North Americans, who started to enjoy this new music and appreciate more the Hispanic culture. One of the most important achievements was their success in the American industry while they were playing Latin music, and to be the first multiracial band of the country. In this year, 2020, it must be considered a regular scene, but at that moment racism and xenophobia were common and well established in society. However,

the most interesting element from this band was not the revolution they created in the States, but the message they hide in their music.

Mario Bouzá, one of the founders of Machito and his Afro-Cubans, described the melody of the band as “like lemon meringue pie, jazz in the top and African-Cuban rhythms at the bottom” (Gottlieb). This simile between their music with a pie shows how Bouzá perceived the music he created. He saw how their music told the history of his country and his life as an immigrant by the employment of diverse rhythms. There are different layers in Latin Jazz, as he mentions, which includes their Hispanic and African heritage and at the same time the influence of the United States. As it is well known, the Spanish empire along with other European powers of the century abused and imposed their culture and religion on the native population when they arrived in American continent. This imposition, which was made mostly by the Spanish Empire, came along with the slave trade in the Caribbean area, which brought the African culture to the new continent. This convergence of cultures created a multicultural environment in the cities had influence in different elements of the culture that is present in this decade.

Bouzá was also influenced by the power of the States in the 20s with what was at that moment the greatest representation of the Afro-American culture in music, Jazz. The connection that Bouzá felt with this genre was huge due to the link that the music from Cuba and Jazz have on African rhythms. The collision of cultures is clear in this genre where the influence of the African roots is a major theme of the music. Afterward, the American genres that would influence Latin music would change and would be more connected to the urban world.

Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans that lived on the mainland share this feeling of connection to the Afro-American scene, especially those who were part of the next generation. Hernández mentions how the children born in the U.S. lived in the same

neighborhoods as African Americans (1029). The closeness between these two groups made them have a similar approach to the world of music. Hip-hop and R&B were very influential in the youth. This caused that many musical genres were affected by this kind of music, which is part of the Afro-American community, in the next generation of Latinos that were born in the States. Prince Royce explains in an interview the influences of these genres in his music:

I was born and raised in New York, in the Bronx, and my parents from the Dominican Republic and that's why I got into bachata in the first place, you know? I would always go to the Dominican Republic and listen to this rhythm and I would always, you know, eat the food, and consume the language, just the Caribbean, you know? And I would also listen to R&B and pop, and I think all those genres I listened to growing up affected the way that I came about and affected my music.

(Music Choice)

These new sounds that can be heard in many songs of groups like Aventura, as was mentioned above, have created a new vision of Latin music mixed with hip-hop and R&B.

Despite how Latinos feel about this connection to African American music, it seems not to be mutual. Language is a barrier between Latinos and the Anglos communities. Henández in her article makes diverse mentions of how difficult is to connect these two groups through music because of the lack of interest from English speakers to listen to something they do not feel connected to. Joell Ortiz talks about this disconnection of both groups when he speaks about how he was rejected many times in his career as a rapper for being Latino: "It's all a battleship, even my own career was a battle. I had to battle pass 'he's nice for a Puerto Rican' ... like Puerto Ricans have been part of hip-hop since [Dr.] Dre" (Djvlad, 0.37 – 1.10). There are many connections between Afro-Americans and Latinos, due to how they usually lived in the same

neighborhoods in cities like New York; however, there is still a gap from the cultural division that Anglos seem to find in Latin groups.

The African American groups had been an important reference in the Latino community, especially in relation to musical aspects. The connection of the Caribbean with their Afro roots has grown stronger in the immigrants that moved to the U.S. territory. The closeness of both communities in the neighborhoods of the city made that many Latin artists born in the mainland found themselves influenced by their music. These musical genres had led to make a connection with the African roots from the Caribbean and to express their American identity.

2.3. Visual Representation of their Identity

It is said that “a picture is worth a thousand words” and, to understand better this diaspora, it is necessary to analyze some images and videos to see the influence of both identities in Latin artists. Album covers and music videos are a huge reference to demonstrate how these musicians want to express themselves through their clothes, the sceneries, or symbols. These social conventions are part of what constitutes scene-based genres, which are defined in Lena and Peterson’s article as genres “whose members enjoy the same kind of music and lifestyle” (703). Nevertheless, the aesthetic and vocabulary used do not have connections with any particular genre, and it is related mostly with the urban scene itself. The genres in which many Latino artists participate are scene-based; however, the way these singers and groups want to express themselves using the codes from diverse American genre to represent something about their Latino heritage is very interesting. To examine this part, covers and videos produced by Latino artist will be taken into account where there are explore their duality of the identity.

The cover of an album has always to attract the public and present the kind of music that the artist is doing. To express their Latin roots, some artists focused on hip-hop and rap like Pitbull in *M.I.A.M.I.²* or N.O.R.E in *N.O.R.E. Y La Familia... Ya Tú Sabe³* decided to appear with the Cuban and Puerto Rican flags, respectively, in the background. These images of them with the flag to represent their origins can be very similar to *Stankonia* by Outkast⁴ or *I Pledge Allegiance to the Grind* by Killer Mike⁵ albums. The use of these flags is employed to highlight the themes that are present in the music; however, the focus is very different. The American rappers use the flag but not from a positive perspective, unlike Latino artists. Killer Mike and Outkast have black versions of The Star-Spangled Banner, and both covers seem to express an idea of violence or death with the stance of the artist or with the employment of skulls as stars. These representations of this national symbol in this genre are very common and can be mentioned many examples of this. Maybe the most controversial presence of the flag on the cover of an album of rap is in Ice Cube's album *Death Certificate⁶* where appears the dead body of a man covered by the flag and with a tag with the name of "UNCLE SAM". The representation of the flag in the covers of rap and hip-hop albums had usually this meaning until the 2010s; however, flags such as Puerto Rican or Cuban were employed to show a national feeling. Both artists in these records wanted to show their interest and love for their roots; and, at the same time, prove how proud are they of their identities. None of them used their flags in an unusual way or a negative version of it like Killer Mike or Outkast. They only put the flags on their backs to show what is their background and roots.

Other singers decide to employ another kind of element to represent this dichotomy. In the '60s, it was very common to show in the covers of salsa music scenes

2. See Figure 3 in Appendix
3. See Figure 4 in Appendix
4. See Figure 5 in Appendix
5. See Figure 6 in Appendix
6. See Figure 7 in Appendix

related to their roots or the American imaginary of Latinos. In the documental *Latin Music USA – Hour 2: The Salsa Revolution*, Willie Colón and Izzy Sanabria explain why many of the covers of Fania Records, the most important Latin record company of the moment, resemble scenes of movies or appear as gangsters as can be observed in the cover of the album *Crime Pays*⁷. The reason for this was due to how they wanted to be like these characters in a stylish way. Films like *Shaft* or *Super Fly*, projects of great importance in the Afro-American community, were a big inspiration for the promotion campaigns made by the company. This idea of representing the urban image that was part of their lives was also represented in Aventura. The group decided to portray in their albums this concept of urban by the inclusion of diverse elements of the metropolitan scenery. *We Broke The Rules*⁸ creates this vision of the urban environment that are part of their lives. In this cover can be found cutouts of telephone booths or signs that could be found in underground stations surrounding the boys. Nevertheless, it is more interesting how the group usually tries to present this atmosphere in their videos. “El Malo” by Aventura has different scenes showing the streets of the Bronx and the typical buildings of the area. This inclusion of some typical stereotypes or scenes of the Sates in their music marks part of their identity as Americans, while they play Latin music

Lastly, some artists decided to put their focus on their origins. Romeo Santos in his solo album tries to represent his roots from the Dominican Republic with his record *Utopia*, which most of the videos of this album make a special emphasis on the culture of the island. “Romeo Santos, El Chaval De La Bachata - Canalla (Official Video)” and “Romeo Santos, Teodoro Reyes - Ileso (Official Video)” are the most relevant ones. In both videos, there are used diverse objects with the pattern of the flag or the flag itself in the background or, in the case of “Romeo Santos, El Chaval De La Bachata - Canalla

7. See Figure 8 in Appendix

8. See Figure 9 in Appendix

(Official Video)”, showing the typical Dominican scene with men playing domino. Camila Cabello, for example, dedicated her video “Camila Cabello - Havana Ft. Young Thug” to the Dreamers and made the protagonist of the video a girl for a second generation and her family living in the United States. She does not put the focus on the idea of how is to be Latina in the U.S., but she makes a clear reference to the language employed in the house between generations and shows the cultural influences from her homeland and Hispanic tradition, such as *telenovelas*. These videos from different artists are focused on manifest the identities that these artists have. They are part of both worlds and have decided to include this in their works to present their realities to the public and at the same time restate themselves as part of the United States and the Caribbean for the American audience.

Visual representation has the same level of relevance as music. It provides the opportunity of knowing the intentions of each artist in relation to what they want to show about their concept of identity. The use of flags or other cultural elements to demonstrate their background and how they are influenced by it is very interesting especially when is employed in covers of their album as a preview of what the public can find in it. The influences of *barrios*, making special emphasis in their lives as Americans, present this other side of their world to the Latino audience. Meanwhile, there are other artists that want to celebrate their roots by making videos based on their traditions putting emphasis on their country of origin or on their life as being part of both societies. In the end, these artists are trying to express who they are not only by their music but, also, by their visual presentation.

3. Pan-Latinidad in U.S. through Music

During this whole analysis, I have been talking about the Latin community as a homogenous unit; nonetheless, this is not true. I have focused on the Hispanic Caribbean

islands, but Latinos in the United States are not only composed of these nationalities. According to MPI⁹, Mexico and El Salvador are the countries with more immigrants in the States. In relation to music, especially for the Anglo market, these ethnicities usually belong to the same group; nevertheless, the Latino community in the United States is divided.

Hispanic communities share their struggles against the power of the United States, a common background and language. These characteristics should make them feel more united but, according to Mallet, Latinos from Latin America and the Caribbean have many cultural divergences. These differences, that are mostly related to how the conquest was experienced differently in each territory, as Melville explains in this quote:

The two characteristics Hispanics have in common is the heritage of Spanish conquest and culture and the utilization of the Spanish language. Yet, the conquest was experienced differently in the various territories, and the culture was syncretized with specific native folk customs and practices. This produced different and easily recognizable national characteristics. Language use, as well, is not standard and uniform. ... In fact, it is by speaking that people whose phenotypes might be similar, usually emphasizing Indian facial types, can identify their national origin. ... The symbols used to rally people, such as flags, music, dance, heroes, anniversaries, are all distinct. (qtd. in Sommers, 37)

This has created an instability between the diverse nationalities that continues discourage to take action as a united group. Although this fragile alliance as Latinos seems insuperable, there are some documented situations where the pan-Latinidad was possible through cultural performances:

9. See Figure 10 and Figure 11 in Appendix

While the [college] campus celebrations retained many Mexican expressive forms, such as mariachis and ballet folklóricos, an expanded symbolic repertoire complemented an increasingly Latino ideology; performances included more generic Latino musics such as salsa and *nueva canción* (new song) and *folklóricos* from Central America as well as Mexico. (Sommers, 42)

This closeness through music is due to how their musical differences are mostly erased in the U.S. territory. The diversity of genres in Latin music offers the opportunity to analyze how connected many ethnicities feel through rhythms that are not part of their tradition.

Hispanic Caribbean artists and genres have had an important role when it comes to the creation of a union between all nationalities that are part of the Latino population. This music has been reclaimed by all Latinos as part of their roots and culture, without taking into account the nationality of the artists or genre of the song. There are many musical styles that had had a huge influence on Latin society; nevertheless, there are only a few of them that have been able to appeal to all nationalities. Salsa and reggaeton can be considered the two genres that have influenced the creation of a pan-ethnicity union between Latinos. To understand why they have been able to appeal to all ethnicities, it is necessary to analyze the origins of these genres and what kind of themes are part of their songs.

3.1. Diasporic Music and their Connection to Latinos

The name salsa (“sauce”) was chosen to express how this music style makes a mix of different genres to create something new. The origin of this genre started in the streets of New York and the Afro-Cuban influence was a significant element to it; however, the Puerto Rican artists were who made this music popular all around the world. There is not a general agreement about which are the biggest influences or contributions for the

creation of salsa, but most experts have reached the conclusion that Cubans and Puerto Ricans have been an essential element to this genre. According to Quintero Rivera,

“salsa strengthened the tradition established by bolero of demolishing rigid associations between musical expressions and particular national cultures and erased the perceived dichotomy between U.S. Afro-American jazz and hip-hop, incorporating Afro-Brazilian sounds such as samba and bossa nova into Caribbean sound fusion ruled by *son*, *guaracha*, *cumbia*, *bomba*, rumba and cha-cha-cha.”

(88)

This idea of combining all types of genres with salsa's clave came due to marketing reasons from part of the president of Fania Records, Jerry Masucci (Kattari, 115). This gave the opportunity to the artists to appeal to all the nationalities by using their traditional music mixed with salsa rhythms.

The case of reggaeton is a little bit different. The influence of this genre came from reggae, as can be observed in its name. Wayne Marshall explains how Jamaican music came in contact with the Hispanic culture from diverse routes. On one hand, there is what was named as *reggae español*. This *reggae español* was recorded in New York as a form to expand the market of reggae to the Hispanic communities. On the other hand, there is the figure of El General, who is recognized as the pioneer of reggaeton. He was a descendant from a Jamaican family, and he brought to the Hispanic public some of the rhythms and songs that he learned from his relatives. However, the reggaeton that is heard nowadays came from the transformation that the *reggae español* and the reggaeton produced by El General suffered in the *barrios* of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was influenced by the musical movement of the United States. In the most underground circles of Puerto Rico, hip-hop had made a huge impact and this was captured in the evolution that the genre took due to it. The first songs from this transformation can be found on the

internet where it can be appreciated how hip-hop was still an important characteristic of this early stage of the genre.

This mix of rhythms and the ease to combine them with other genres makes reggaeton the perfect successor to the salsa movement. There are many songs that demonstrate its versatility by employing a reggaeton beat, dembow¹⁰, with melodies from other genres, making many interesting songs that can appeal to diverse collectives. “Te he Querido, Te he Llorado” by Ivy Queen, one of the most important female singers, mixes bachata with reggaeton; or “Sabor a Melao” by Daddy Yankee with Andy Montañez combines reggaeton with salsa. Salsa and bachata are the most common mixings; nevertheless, there are examples of calypso included in the “La Botella” by Mach & Daddy or tango in “Tango del Pecado” by Calle 13. These are some examples of how reggaeton can adapt to any genre and, therefore, to the necessity of any nationality.

As it can be observed, both genres have this diasporic background. This confluence between their Latin tradition and American influence makes them the perfect example of what many individuals of the Latin population feel. They have this mix of nationalities in their melodies that appeal to all the groups that have lived in a divided reality because of their dual identity. These songs and artists can be easily taken as a representation of the pan-Latino society on the United States, due to how they refer to this concept of crossover. Salsa and reggaeton were born from the combination of many Latin rhythms with the American genres, which can be easily identified with the situation that many U.S. born Latinos feel like a mixture of both worlds. This representation of what is to be Latino in the States along with the opportunity of mixing *salsa* and reggaeton with traditional genres of all the Latin communities provides the perfect musical styles to represent Latinos. These genres can be adapted to the needs of each nationality and, at

10. *Dembow* is the name given to the rhythm usually employed in reggaeton. This rhythm came from the Spanish version by Nando Boom of the song “Dem bow” by Shabba Ranks made in New York (Wayne, 23.50 – 28.58).

the same time, can be recognized as part of all Latinos because of how they represent the duality of being Latino and an American.

3.2. Lyrics and their Meanings as a Group

The lyrics that came along with these rhythms have a significant component in the creation of what it means to be Latino. The songs put an emphasis in trying to reflect a reality any individual could identify with, irrespective if they are Mexicans or Dominicans (Visser, 43 - 44). The interest of this topic is how appealed to the public for this union through diverse methods in their lyrics and videos, in the case of reggaeton.

Salsa has been a method to narrate the stories that many Latinos experienced in the States. They were living in a new country and they lived in the same neighborhoods and worked in similar jobs. Their experiences as immigrants were very alike. Willie Colón and Ruben Blades wanted to express in their music the social problems that they experienced in the streets of New York as Latinos, nevertheless, these histories were not only limited to this city. “La maleta”, “Pedro Navaja” or “Pablo Pueblo” portrayed some of the realities that each Latino have to survive every day. These songs revolve around telling short stories of the urban reality. “La Maleta” or “Pablo Pueblo” deal with deportation and the low wage jobs in factories; meanwhile, “Pedro Navaja” focus on the crime that was present on the streets. These songs were mostly targeted to the Latinos who lived in the Big Apple, but the Latinos from California or Miami felt that these songs represented some of their experiences as immigrants in the country and found these salsa songs as a mirror of their reality.

On the other hand, Celia Cruz along with Willie Colón made a call on to all Latinos in the United States in “Latinos en Estados Unidos”. In this song, the concept of union between all ethnicities is clear since the beginning. Both artists request for alliance as Latinos in the States, “Latinos en Estados Unidos / Vamos a unirnos, vamos a unirnos”.

Celia Cruz highlights the elements that all Latinos have in common such as heritage “Venimos de la América India / Del negro y del español” and language “No dejes que te convenzan / Que no se pierda el idioma español / ¡Oye, mira! ¡El inglés es muy bonito! El Frances también. / ¡Pero el idioma de nosotros es un tiro, mi hermano!”. Moreover, Celia Cruz with La Sonora Matancera has dedicated some songs to Mexico and Puerto Rico, where she expresses her feeling of community: “Y un saludo fraternal / Le manda el suelo Cubano / A todos los mexicanos / Como prueba de amistad” (“De Cuba a México”). This kind of approach to the other nationalities has helped to build this concept of pan-Latinidad in the American society.

Nowadays salsa stills is one of the most important Latin genres; nevertheless, reggaeton and its successor, *trap español*, have taken this position as a representation of their pan-ethnicity with the emergence of these genres. Reggaeton can be considered the successor of the salsa movement that started in the 70s and 80s. It can be observed this connection between them in the song “Quitate Tu Pa Ponerme Yo [sic]” by Eddie Dee and other artists. This single is a combination of reggaeton with salsa which is considered by many an anthem of reggaeton. The song makes many allusions to the movement of salsa, even the phrase “quítate tú pa’ ponerme yo” is a reference to the “Quítate Tú - Live” by Fania All-Stars. The song highlights the influence of this genre but in their performance in the Latin Grammys in 2005, they wanted to demonstrate the impact of salsa in their music. In this performance, all *reggaetoneros* appeared wearing shirts with the phrase “el discípulo de” (disciple of) followed by the faces and names of some of the celebrities of Fania All-Stars. This song is a clear statement of how these artists see themselves as the modern version of salsa’s movement in our days.

Salsa included themes in their music that made all Latinos, regardless of their nationality, feel appealed by it, and if reggaeton is the successor to genre, they must

include songs that have the same appeal to all groups. “Mataron un Inocente” by the duo Hector & Tito shows the increase of criminal violence on the island and demand to stop this by asking God (“Oye mi dios para la guerra, por favor / No quiero más muerte, no quiero más matón”) or by calling on criminals (“Dios te lo dio, pero también te lo puede quitar / Y si tú matas también te matarán”). This song is very similar to the formula employed in salsa by Blades and Colón, and the lack of geographical references makes it the perfect song to be adapted to any context. There are many songs dedicated to denouncing criminality in the neighborhoods, but reggaeton’s main focus has been always on the union.

Their similitudes are not only in relation to their popularity all around the world but also in their intention of creating this pan-Latino identity. Many songs of this genre focus on this concept of collaboration between Latinos. Daddy Yankee and Don Omar are the biggest names in this genre, and both were part of a song that was made to emphasize this union. “Reggaeton Latino” by Don Omar with Fat Joe, N.O.R.E. and L.D.A. mentions how these genres represent all Latinos, “Esta es nuestra herencia Latina / La voz que representa nuestra raza bonita”. On the other hand, Daddy Yankee is part of a collaboration with N.O.R.E. and Nina Sky in the song “Oye Mi Canto” in which the chorus mentions many nationalities, “Boricua, morena, dominicano, colombiano / Boricua, morena, cubano, mexicano / Oye mi canto”. In both videos there are references to a common past in the former with historical records of many symbolic moments of Latino history; or with the visual representation of flags from diverse countries in “Oye Mi Canto”. Anuel AA, a *trap español* artist, in “Reggaetonera” does something similar to what was done in “Oye Mi Canto”. The *trapper* in his video shows diverse flags from Latin America and Spain while he sings about how a girl loves to dance reggaeton. He has classified the song as focused on the reggaeton culture (Flow Miami, 0.06 – 0.16).

This decision of using reggaeton culture along with a graphic representation of many nationalities demonstrates how this genre had an influence in the creation of a community through its rhythms. Salsa made a clear allusion to this idea of community as Latinos, but reggaeton decided to make a union between the Latinos that were living in the United States and those who were in their homelands.

The appealing of these genres to the creation of pan-ethnicity was not only because of the fusion of popular and traditional rhythms with these new styles, but it came by the inclusion of topics that affected all Latino groups. The lyrics made special emphasis on having a common background and similar experiences between all the Hispanic nationalities.

4. Latin Music Influence: Crossover or Whitewashing?

Billboard published an article on the 6th of December of 2020 where they announced that “Bad Bunny’s ‘El Ultimo Tour del Mundo’ Debuts at No. 1 on Billboard 200 Chart, Is First All-Spanish No. 1 Album”. This position as number 1 has never been reached by an album all-Spanish-language in the 64 years of life that this chart has. Last year, it was very remarkable for Latino music. The inclusion of Shakira and Jennifer Lopez in the Superbowl’s halftime in 2020 showed how there is more audience each day to this music. This has made history in music, especially for the Latino community. Latino rhythms have overtaken the world, and this has affected the way that this music is perceived by many sectors.

Those Latin genres, which were able to break the differences between Hispanic nationalities, have been very important to the creation of a pan-ethnicity in the United States. This music represents every Latino, it does not matter their traditions. This success in the States for Latinos has been a consequence of this common idea of pan-ethnicity

that was mentioned above. There is a high number of Latinos in the country and their support to artists like Bad Bunny made it possible for an album completely in Spanish to reach this position in the *Billboards*, and this has brought the attention of the Anglo groups.

This Latin *boom* in music has caused that many American artists have decided to collaborate with Hispanic singers and groups. This movement for part of the American industry has been acclaimed by the American market, but some Latin communities have criticized it. This phenomenon has created some kind of controversy about if this is a ‘crossover’ or only a way to ‘whitewash’ this music now that is popular. The many collaborations between these artists in the last years has only grown with each accomplishment that Latin music is making in the global market. To analyze this topic, it will be taking into account the songs and reactions of the artists and public to these collaborations.

There is not a specific moment in the industry to mark the beginning of this phenomenon, but it can be considered “*Despacito*” as the first evidence of this change in music. Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee, both Puerto Ricans, presented in their video the culture of their homeland accompanied by a catchy melody of reggaeton. Everyone enjoyed the song and video when it was published in January of 2017. In the States, Beltrán remembers how he “was pleasantly surprised when [...] “*Despacito*,” at the top of the Latin charts, started to be picked up by English-speaking mainstream radio stations and dance clubs.” This showed the power of Latin music not only among Latinos but the Anglo groups. In April, it was announced the remix with Justin Bieber. Bieber’s contribution to the songs was some stanzas in English and him singing the chorus in Spanish. The remix was a success. *Billboard* informed how it collected “more than 20 million views in just 24 hours.” (Flores) Before Bieber, the song’s higher position in

Billboard's Hot 100 was 44, after this new version was out the song was number 1 for 16 consecutive weeks. Certainly, the remix had a major success in the American market than the original.

The collaboration of artists from Hispanic and American markets could be considered as a way to appreciate the cultural heritage of the Latin community; nevertheless, many aspects made Latinos suspect some of these collaborations especially in those with a white English-speaking artist. The employment of Justin Bieber as a cover of a Latin music playlist in Spotify made many people feel like they were erasing the work that its original artists made putting only the emphasis on the Canadian singer (Mamo). It did not help that this came after the controversies revolving around Bieber's whitewashing, who included the dembow rhythm in his song "Sorry". The composer, BLOOD, never expressed where the influences came from and referred only to how "the beat is saying moving forward, and apologizing, can be exciting and fun." (qtd. Skolnick) This lack of intention to give the credit to the Latin music or artists with this type of action was classified as whitewashing. Although the Hispanic public can easily appreciate the influences or the original version of "Despacito" or in "Sorry", the Anglo audience only perceives this as a new reinvention on music for part of Bieber.

Bieber may be one of the controversial artists to participate in a song in Spanish; however, he does sing in Spanish in the song and he does not try to exoticize Latinos in his participation in "Despacito". On the other hand, Madonna does not even sing in Spanish in "Medellín" (2019) and the song seems to be a fetishization of Latin culture. In this song, the Colombian singer Maluma participates in the track, but his role seems to consist of providing 'flavor' to the production and attracting the Hispanic public by singing in Spanish. The song is plagued by many clichés about Latin culture in the lyrics and video. Mentions to chachachá, which is Cuban and not Colombian, drugs ("I took a pill and had

a dream” or “I took a trip, it set me free”) and parties only represent this fantasy that Americans have of Latin America. Kai Page gives perfect explanation to how Madonna presents the city in her lyrics, “Madonna is idealizing a Colombian city as a place for her to go party and pretends to be culturally aware by picking out a few token Spanish words that her mostly white audience will understand.” The video only seems to be focusing on perpetuating this idea of exoticism with Maluma characterized as a Latin lover and to include scenes that can be interpreted as a bullfight, in which Madonna takes the role of the bull. The Queen of Pop with this performance seems to be only taking what can be considered exotic from Hispanic culture, regardless of the culture of Medellín.

Other American artists have decided to try to draw the attention of the Hispanic public. Black Eyed Peas has been working with Latin celebrities in the last years to reach this audience. Their approach seems not to be focused on the idea of exoticism and more on the creation of a crossover, due to how Will.I.Am was raised in a Mexican neighborhood and Taboo’s father is Mexican. In *Translation*, the group has sung in Spanish and tried to adapt their music to Latino rhythms. Taboo explained why they decided to work with these Latin artists:

It was something very natural for us to work on focusing on this album for Latin artists. It’s part of our musical inspiration since day one ... So, it was amazing that we got a chance to focus on making a Latino album, focus on Afro-beat, Latin rhythms and ... this just our way to celebrate and show love to the Latino community. (Univisión, 2.16-3.03)¹¹

This decision to celebrate Latino community through their music by highlighting its influence has been well received by the public. The same happened when Nicky Minaj

11. In the interview Taboo speaks in Spanglish. The original quote is: Era algo muy natural para nosotros trabajar enfocarnos en este disco para artistas latinos [sic]. It’s part of our musical inspiration since day one ... So, it was amazing that we got a chance to focus on making a Latino album, focus on Afro-beat, Latin rhythms and ... this just our way to celebrate and show love to the Latino community.

joined Karol G in “Tusa”. Although the rapper only speaks sings in Spanish a few phrases and the chorus, her participation in the song seems to have been qualified as this crossover between these two worlds.

Becky G had been expressing her Latino heritage through music for years. She is considered one of the most important singers of the urban genres in the last years. She expressed how she feels herself as the representation of the crossover in a conversation with Jay Wheeler, “I not doing the crossover, I am the crossover” (0.25-0.27). This idea of a crossover between cultures maybe can be only represented through Latino artists born in the United States. Selena Gomez is now expressing her interest in her Mexican heritage after collaborating in songs such as “Taki Taki”. In her new video “De Una Vez” shows how she wants to demonstrate more about her roots by singing in Spanish and wearing clothes and hairstyles that resemble the Mexican tradition. This along with the collaboration with Latino celebrities in songs like “Baila Conmigo”, she is trying to rescue what is part of her culture. They are part of these two cultures; therefore, they can perfectly represent this mix in their music.

This controversy about if these multiple remixes and collaboration between English speaking and Latino artists are whitewashing or crossover has been going on for a few years. These mixes have been happening for decades, Ricky Martin and Shakira adapted their music to the American public and are examples of successful Latin artist in the States. However, this is the first time that Latin music has this huge influence in the international and Anglo market with songs in Spanish as Bad Bunny proved with his last album or Jennifer López and Shakira with their halftime show. This situation has created an interesting debate around if this a movement to praise Latin music in Spanish for the first time or only wants to take advantage of the catchy rhythms for how exotic they find

it. This can provide a new perspective of how the population of the United States sees the Hispanic population.

Conclusions

Latino community is a fundamental part of the United States. A big part of its population is part of this group. They have gone to this country to look for a better socioeconomic situation and brought their traditions with them. This music has been the way that some people have connected with their roots. The ‘melting pot’ that was created in the streets of the cities of the United States made it possible that many Latinos born in the U.S. connected with their roots and, at the same time, with their identity as Americans through urban genres. This environment caused a revolution in music, which now was focused on mixing Caribbean rhythms with American genres. These artists wanted to portray how they were Latinos and Americans in their music. Their identities were expressed not only through melodies, but key visual aspects on their videos or covers of the album presented them as part of both worlds.

This Caribbean music combined with other genres, that has been employed to represent this duality in their lives, has not only to be important for Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, or Cubans in the States. There has been difficult to create a feeling of pan-ethnicity between immigrants from Latin American and the Caribbean, but it seems that these genres that expressed this diaspora made it possible to connect them all. Salsa and, later on, reggaeton was able to help to create this idea of community thanks to how they could fusion their music with other genres from Latin American as tango. Their lyrics, also, expressed situations that many Latinos could identify with their personal circumstances such as deportation. Many artists of this genre call on a union as Latinos, highlighting their cultural past and language as key elements of their *Latinidad*.

The revolution that these genres, especially Hispanic urban music, created a new movement in the American market. Many English-speaking artists decided to collaborate with Latin singers or groups. This change in the industry has created a debate about if this approach has been only a way to whitewash the Latin music or as a way made a crossover between cultures. There have been many opinions about this topic, but it seems that these diverse views on the theme can provide a new perspective to what it means Latin music in the United States.

Music is a vital part of the Latino community. It is a representation of the history of who they are. The expression of themselves, as a people that belong to two cultures, has made them create something that many people who are not part of the community are enjoying. Latin music is a revolution now, but it must not be forgotten how these artists started because they wanted to show how they were of something different. Their music was the representation of what it is to be a Latino and American. Certainly, these genres have had a huge impact on more than one generation of Latinos, and it seems that this music will be continuing to have it for a long time.

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Appendix

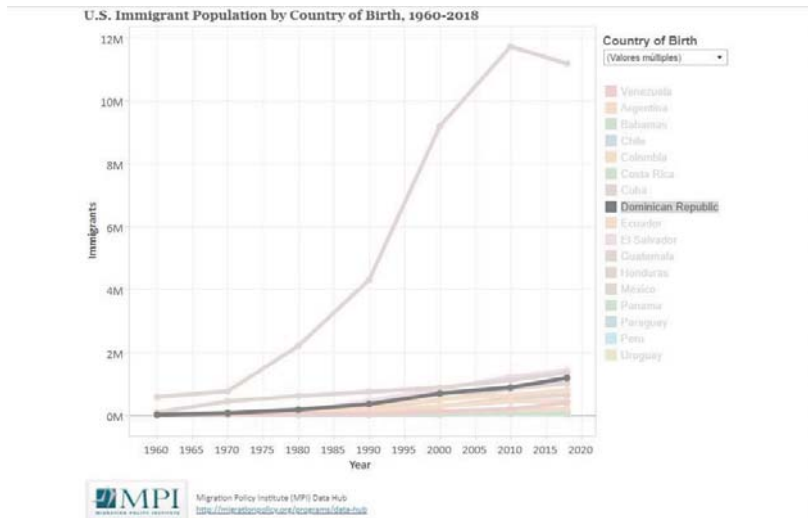


Figure 1. Graph of Hispanic Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960 to the present: Dominican Republic from Migration Policy Institute. “Hispanic Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960-Present”,2020.

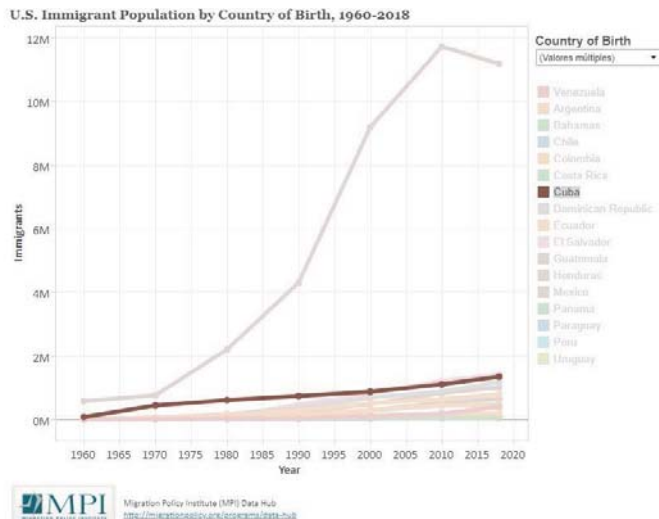


Figure 2. Graph of Hispanic Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960 to the present: Dominican Republic from Migration Policy Institute. “Hispanic Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960-Present”,2020.

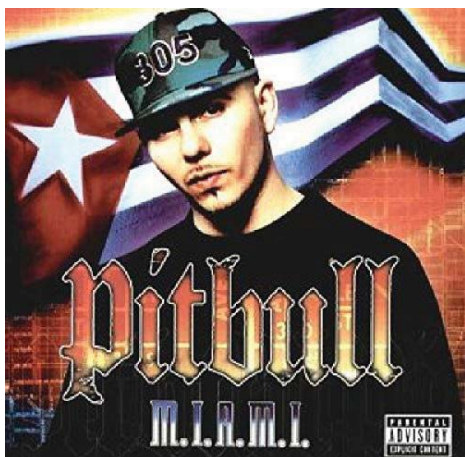


Figure 3. Cover of the album M.I.A.M.I from *M.I.A.M.I.* by Pitbull, 2004.

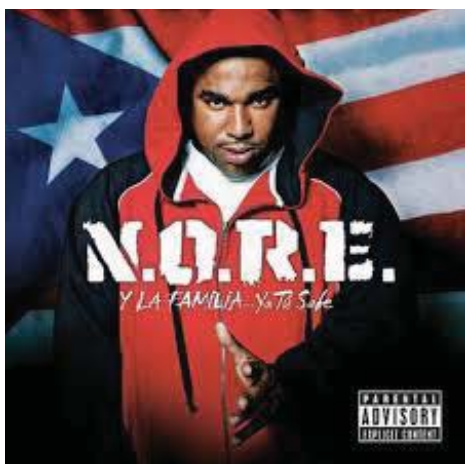


Figure 4. Cover of the álbum N.O.R.E. Y La Familia... Ya Tú Sabe from *N.O.R.E. Y La Familia... Ya Tú Sabe* by N.O.R.E., 2007.



Figure 5. Cover of the album *Stankonia* from *Stankonia* by Outkast, 2007.



Figure 6. Cover of the album *I Pledge Allegiance to the Grind* from *I Pledge Allegiance to the Grind* by Killer Mike, 2006.



Figure 7. Cover of the album *Death Certificate* from *Death Certificate* by Ice Cube, 1991.



Figure 8. Cover of the album *Crime Pays* from *Crime Pays* by Willie Colón, 1972.

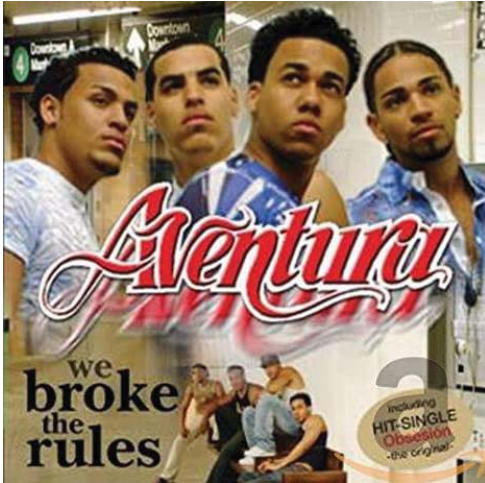


Figure 9. Cover of the album *We Broke the Rules* from *We Broke the Rules* by Aventura, 2002.

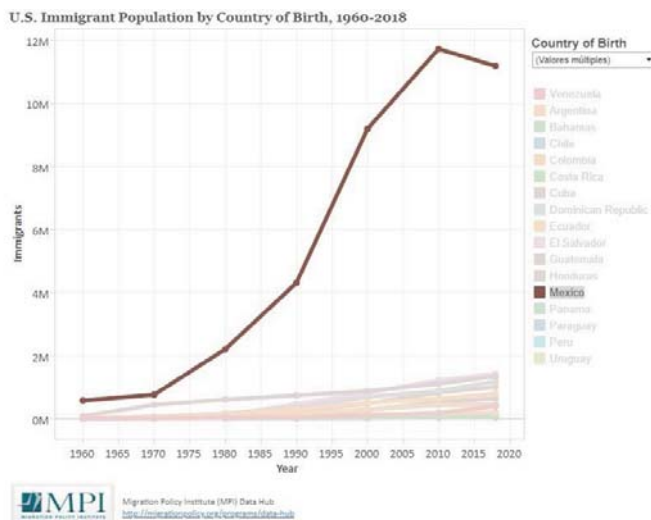


Figure 10. Graph of Hispanic Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960 to the present: Mexico from Migration Policy Institute. “Hispanic Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960-Present”, 2020.

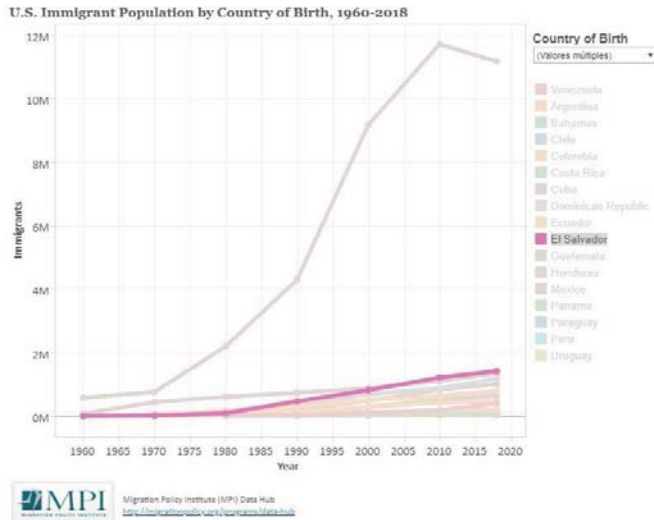


Figure 11. Graph of Hispanic Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960 to the present: El Salvador from Migration Policy Institute. “Hispanic Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960-Present”, 2020.