**APPROVAL OF HONORS PROGRAM SENIOR PROJECT**

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**Project Title**

*The Power of Music: How Different Music Genres Shape Cultures Around the World*

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April 28, 2026

# The Power of Music: How Different Music Genres Shape Cultures Around the World

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April 20, 2026

## Table of Contents

The Psychology of Music in the Brain ..... 5
Hip Hop & Rock in The United States ..... 7
Mariachi, Rancheras, and Corridos - The Heart of Mexico ..... 10
The Rhythm of Samba & Bossa Nova in Brazil ..... 13
Jamaica's Reggae - The Sound of the Island ..... 15
South Korea's K-Pop Revolution ..... 18
Puerto Rico's Urban Anthem - The Rise of Reggaeton ..... 22
Beyond the Melody - Lasting Thoughts on Music and Culture ..... 25
My Personal Reflection ..... 27
Resources ..... 29

More than art, music is a form of expression, a form of rebellion, and the best way to show the world who we are. Music exists all around us, in every store we go to, in the restaurant we eat in, and even in grocery stores. Music can be understood even if it's not in your language; you can just “feel” what is being expressed. We have always used music for multiple purposes, such as celebrating or communicating our own beliefs to the world around us. As time passed, music was not only used as an expression or an art, but it also became something more than that. By shaping traditions, it has become a tool that impacts cultures, our thoughts, and even our values. Today, music is not only entertainment, but a communication tool that speaks of our struggles, our identity, and social change. Across the world, music has shaped entire generations, changing who they are at their core, making music a long-lasting part of cultural identity.

Besides being a form of expression, music affects society psychologically. Studies of brain scans have shown that music can light up a large portion of the brain, including the hippocampus and amygdala, located deep within the brainwhich activates emotions. It also stimulates the limbic system, which impacts how we feel pleasure, what motivates us, and rewards. Lastly, it also impacts the body's motor system (Eck, 2024). With this, we can see that music has a significant impact on who we are, how we feel, and how we see the world around us. In addition, music also helps people make connections with each other. Music becomes a shared feeling within communities, helping them express their faith, excitement, rebellion, and even how they identify. As time passes, these shared feelings become something permanent that is passed from generation to generation.

In this study, I will examine how specific music genres shaped culture, identity, and beliefs in six different countries: The United States, Mexico, Brazil, Jamaica, South Korea, and Puerto Rico. Each of these countries was significantly impacted by music, either politically, socially or economically, by an influential music genre.

To start with, in the United States, hip-hop and rock became a form of rebellion, but also a form of expression, identity, and political expression (Tate et al., 2026). In Mexico, corridos, mariachi, and rancheras became a way to encourage family values, express national pride, communicate traditions, and even address crime (Melendez, 2025). In Brazil, samba and bossa nova united diverse populations through rhythm and celebration, bringing the communities together as one of the favelas and its urban class, creating a sense of community connections between society (Rose Max & Ramatis, n.d.,). In Jamaica, reggae was inspired by rhythms of Ska and Rock steady which explored themes of spirituality, rebellion, and social justice (Aïnouche, 2012). South Korea's K-pop reshaped the perception of Korean identity while also transforming younger cultures and beauty standards worldwide (Challenges Abroad, n.d.). Even if Puerto Rico is part of the United States, reggaeton has had a significant impact on its economy and how the world perceives its culture. Latin music revenue reached an all-time high of $1.4 billion in 2024, and since 2015, over 50% of the top Latin songs on the Billboard Hot Latin Songs Year-End Chart have originated from Puerto Rico (Rivera, 2025).

By exploring these genres of music and how each one contributes to its culture and the psychological effects it has on people, this essay explains how music can have an impact on how we perceive each other. Through different rhythms and lyrics, music

becomes a tool that can shape how entire cultures perceive themselves, how they think, and how they fit in. Music not only has a psychological impact, but it also has the power to impact a nation's economic growth (MUSQ ETF, 2025). Even when each genre of music tells a different story, we notice a pattern; music is not only heard, but it is also felt, lived, and experienced.

## The Psychology of Music in the Brain

It is known that music has a psychological impact on us. Music is capable of shaping our memory, emotions, identity, and social behavior. Music begins as sound waves that travel through the ear and are processed by the brain, activating multiple areas in our neural system at the same time (Lumen Learning, n.d.). Research shows that listening to music stimulates areas responsible for emotions, the body's motor system, and even our memory, allowing people to experience music not only mentally, but also emotionally and physically (Eck, 2024). This research helps us understand why people often associate music with specific moments, as it reinforces memories tied to those experiences. Since music engages with more than one area in our brain, it is capable of changing our mood and creating lasting memories. This highlights that music plays an important role in shaping identity.

One of the effects of music that most of us have experienced is its ability to regulate emotions and reduce stress. Studies have shown that music can lower cortisol levels, which are the hormones associated with stress, helping us relax and feel a sense of peace (American Nurse Association, 2024). As a result, music has been used as therapy to help people heal from trauma, anxiety, and emotional problems. On the

other hand, music is used all around the world for celebration and entertainment, helping people connect with each other by creating shared memories.

Another interesting fact about music is the role it has in shaping memory and our imagination. Songs tend to serve as a way of reminding us of past experiences, specific moments, and emotions. Research proposes that music activates the hippocampus, the area of the brain that forms part of the limbic system, which is important in regulating emotional responses. Also, it is thought to be principally involved in storing long-term memories and in making those memories resistant to forgetting (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2026), which is why melodies and lyrics often bring back vivid memories (How Music Affects the Brain? 15 Real-Life Scenarios Explained, 2025), such as a celebration party or even a breakup. These connections to music help listeners relate to the music they listen to, making them feel what the song is trying to communicate through its sounds.

The repetition of music also has had an impact on the social aspects of psychology. Music can help young adults with emotional regulation, it can serve as a way of support, and even help alleviate loneliness. Most importantly, it can help adolescents to develop a sense of connection and belonging, which can help them make friends who also listen to the same music as them (Hallam & Himonides, 2022). This sense of belonging and the repetition of messages can impact how people view the world and their cultural values. Most of the time, lyrics tell us stories of social issues happening all around us, along with their values and social expectations. These messages can shape people's attitudes towards them. Over time, these repeated messages become planted in our minds, influencing people's behavior, personality, and

reaction to the world around them. Research notes that when people share music, they create a link based on these shared emotional responses. How music builds relationships is thanks to this powerful psychological response, creating bonds based on shared emotions and memories (MDLBEAST, 2025).

Lastly, studies show how people process music styles and emotion in music. Neuroimaging studies have demonstrated that experiencing music chills activates the brain's reward system, which is also the same part of the brain that is activated with things such as food, sex, and drugs. Further research indicates that different parts of the brain are involved in anticipating music chills at different moments. The dorsal striatum (part of the brain that helps control habits, routines, and movement) and ventral striatum (part of the brain that processes pleasure, reward, and motivation), are involved in anticipating and experiencing music chills. In addition, when people listen to a song for the first time and find it rewarding, the connectivity between the nucleus accumbens and the auditory cortex is strengthens (Domingues et al., 2025). This highlights the importance of music and the impact it has on the human brain. Knowing this information, we can come to the conclusion that music is not only a form of art or entertainment, but an influence that affects cultures in society. With different rhythms, tones, and sounds, each culture is affected differently.

## Hip-Hop & Rock in The United States

During the mid 1900s, hip-hop and Rock were two of the most influential music genres each had a significant impact on society. During this time, music was not only used as entertainment but to reflect changes in social values, cultural changes, and identity. Even though both styles of music originated way back, each one had a

significant impact on American culture. Hip-hop's rise in the 1990s represented one of the most important transformations in U.S. popular music history, sparking the biggest music revolution in 50 years (Regan, 2015). Besides this, rock music's development in the mid-1950s challenged social expectations and contributed to the construction of youth identity and cultural expression rooted in rhythms drawn from African American music traditions (*Rock music*, 2018).

The appearance of rock and roll in the early 1950s in the United States was inspired by African American music traditions such as blues, rhythm and blues, country, and gospel. Examples of rock artists during this time include Chuck Berry, Ruth Brown, Little Richard, and Muddy Waters (Rock and Roll Hall of Fame + Museum, 2012). These artists symbolized rebellion through their music, changing the way that younger generations expressed themselves, which differed from older generations. From this, we can see that rock became a big contributor to teenage identity, using rock as a way to express their freedom, their emotions, and their resistance to social expectations.

Hip-hop originated in the Bronx, New York, in the early 1970's. This genre of music emerged from a different form of social culture, among an economically declining society, where racial inequality and limited opportunities for disadvantaged communities were common. Compared to rock, which relied on live instrumentation, hip-hop focused more on rhythms and storytelling. DJs used music as a means of coping, making what was only a live experience and a fun moment into a narration of lyrics that told meaningful stories. Hip-hop artists who weren't afraid to speak their minds about societal problems, such as police brutality, helped to be a voice for people, especially for inner-city youths and minorities (HHGA Staff, 2020).

Not only did hip-hop become more popular and expand worldwide in the 1980s and 1990s, but it also became one of the most powerful cultural forces in American history. Hip-hop expanded to places such as Latin America, South London, Africa, and Panama (MTV Music, 2023). Beyond music, hip-hop influenced fashion, language, and cultural attitudes. Some of the fashion influences included baggy clothing, sneakers, big jewelry, and street wear, which became a form of identity as well as slang, which was part of everyday speech. This genre of music also helped to reflect how minorities felt about issues such as police brutality, racism, and poverty. Artists like Public Enemy, Grand Nubia, Ice Cube, and X-Clan started promoting a political message of resistance in their music to a greater extent than any popular genre at the time (Ogbar, 2017).

From a psychological perspective, hip-hop helped communities feel a sense of belonging and validation. Having a genre of music that people could relate to through their struggles and resilience allowed people to feel a sense of belonging. Over time, this genre of music was not only American, but it was spread across the world, telling the story of Americans and their culture. The influence that hip-hop had on the younger generation shows us their view on authority, justice, and identity. Music was a way to speak up about social inequality as well as a way to empower listeners that things could change.

Public Enemy's song “Fight the Power” is one of the many songs that talk about political and social issues. This song conveys some of the many issues that the lower class goes through. The group sings “Got to give us what we want / Gotta give us what we need / Our freedom of speech is freedom or death / We got to fight the powers that be” (Public Enemy, 1989). Here, the lyrics highlight how their freedom of speech is

something that they need, since they feel the lack of it as a human and something that everyone deserves to have. Later in the song, it also mentions how changes need to be made, how things need to revolutionize, and the irony that we are all people, but not all of us have the same rights due to the lack of knowledge that they don't have. Using such a strong message in a song shows us that music can act as a form of protest and expression.

Both rock and hip-hop help us see how American music is more than just a source of entertainment; it also has an impact on culture and beliefs. Both genres arose in a time of chaos and political change, making this music especially influential to those who listen. By using music as a form of emotional expression, artists were able to speak for those who did not have any power, giving a voice to the communities who felt unheard.

**Mariachi, Rancheras, and Corridos - The Heart of Mexico**

In Mexico, music has served as a way to express cultural pride, social values, and national identity. Some of the most influential music traditions that have shaped culture in Mexico have been genres such as Mariachi, rancheras, and corridos (UCLA Strachwitz Frontera Collection, 2017). These genres have emerged from the rural communities and their struggles, becoming a symbol of their identity among the whole Mexican nation. In comparison to other music genres that reflect individual expression, Mexican music highlights shared experience, traditions, and ingrained cultural values.

Corridos are around 200 years old, originating from northern Mexico, and take the form of a ballad, where a story is told. Corridos are regarded as one of the most prominent folk expressions of Mexico’s rural working-class culture (UCLA Strachwitz

Frontera Collection, 2017). In earlier days, Mexican corridos were made to narrate important information regarding a person's story. From real-life events such as horse racing, assassinations, injustices, or heroistic acts, corridos transformed music into a form of cultural memory, shared beliefs, honor, and struggles.

Over time, the messages that corridos communicated had shifted from telling stories about urban life to music about drug trafficking. This impacts Mexican culture because corridos have accompanied Mexico throughout the years, but now that corridos are dedicated to talking about drug trafficking or violence, several states in Mexico have decided to ban them, as it glorifies crime. They decided to prohibit corridos due to the fact that many young people have been influenced by this type of music, affecting them negatively. This has caused an increase in violence, raising fears about how music influences young people's behavior and how it harms the community. These bans not only impact the music but also influence public debate, as it raises concerns about freedom of expression. As a result, the banning of corridos has become an arguable, debatable issue in Mexico. Some argue that narcocorridos are not the reason why young people join cartels; instead, they believe that it is the system, the lack of opportunity, and poverty that push them to do so (Espinoza Miranda, 2025). Research states that Nayarit was the first state in 2025 to ban corridos, and after Nayarit, several more states joined, such as Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan, Aguascalientes, and more (Billboard, 2025).

Two other popular genres in Mexico that have impacted its culture are ranchera and mariachi. These two genres of music are very similar to each other. Both of these genres of music originated in the state of Jalisco during the 19th century. In the 20th

century, during the Mexican Revolution, mariachi music implemented the themes of both romance and heartbreak in its songs. There are theories that say that mariachi music comes from the saying ‘the Indian is happy’ in Nahualth (Yela, 2018), a Mexican native language, and others say that it comes from *‘mariage’* meaning marriage in France (West Music, n.d.). Some of the characteristics of ranchera music are dramatic emotion and poetic love lyrics. The voices of singers tend to change depending on the lyrics; this way, artists can convey the feelings of the lyrics through their voice, sometimes moving people to tears (Yan, 2024).

Mexican singer Pepe Aguilar, in the lyrics of “El Corrido De Monterrey,” expresses his pride in being Mexican. The singer expresses that “Es por eso que soy norteño / de esa tierra de ensueño / que se llama Nuevo León / tierra linda que siempre sueño / y que muy dentro llevo si señor / llevo en mi corazón” (That's why I'm from the north / from that dreamland / called Nuevo León / beautiful land I always dream of / and that I carry deep inside, yes sir / I carry in my heart) (Pepe Aguilar, 2005), empathizing his deep connection to his homeland. By describing Nuevo Leon as a beautiful land that he always dreams of “tierra linda que siempre sueño”, the song reflects both personal attachment and idealization of the land. The pride described in these and thousands of other songs highlights how music can be used as a form of expression that strengthens identity and cultural heritage. Psychologically, since lyrics tend to talk about everyday life and Mexican tradition, it helps listeners feel a sense of connection and relatability with what they are listening to, as if they were experiencing the song itself.

These genres have played an important role in shaping the values and behavior within Mexican culture and society. The topics of the lyrics tend to talk about romantic

relationships, emphasizing loyalty, heartbreak, and devotion, which influences how people express and understand love. On the other hand, they also describe rural life, including life in the countryside, the importance of family, and hard work, which have made these topics a part of Mexican identity. By using these songs as storytelling, rancheras allow those who listen to connect with the music's message. From a psychological perspective, these songs have not only served as entertainment, but they have also helped preserve and reinforce the important cultural values, traditions, and heritage within Mexican culture. Therefore, rancheras as well as mariachi music continue to influence how people interact with each other and help us understand Mexican culture today.

**The Rhythm of Samba & Bossa Nova in Brazil**

In Brazil, two of the most influential genres are samba and bossa nova. Samba and bossa nova have an African and European influence on its music, which have shaped how Brazilians identify and express themselves within each other. Samba started in the late 19th century and early 20th century, deeply influenced by African American traditions, which were brought by enslaved people. Now, samba is seen as a music genre common to communities in Rio de Janeiro (Vick, 2022). At first, samba was associated with lower-class neighborhoods, but with time, this music genre became an important representation of carnival and other Brazilian celebrations (Montes-Bradley, 2025). Its upbeat rhythms and performances help people connect, creating a sense of community by celebrating their culture and traditions.

On the other hand, bossa nova, which was created with a combination of jazz and samba, originated in the late 1950’s in Rio de Janeiro. Bossa nova translates to

"new style" or "new trend." Lyrics tend to talk about personal longing, love, and the tranquility of nature. Another thing to consider is the instruments, such as classical guitar, bass, and claves, which play a clicking pattern similar to Afro-Cuban music (MasterClass, 2021). Both of these genres help Brazil preserve its culture, identity, and values.

From a psychological perspective, Samba and bossa nova affect the brain in different ways. Samba rhythm can be considered a faster-paced and more upbeat genre of music, which can be related to more celebratory moments, including carnival, parties, and community. On the other hand, bossa nova has a more relaxed and romantic rhythm, often associated with personal and special occasions, such as dates, films, and media, which can evoke a more sensual aesthetic environment (FATI Production HK, 2025).

Once samba and bossa nova gained recognition, they contributed to how people around the world viewed Brazil and its culture. Artists like João Gilberto and Antônio Carlos Jobim, who made *Getz/Gilberto*, were successful by reaching a large audience and selling over 2 million albums in the first year in the US, which made Getz an international star (Hall, 2022). This global reach shows us how music can have a great impact all around the world, allowing listeners to experience cultural traditions from places they have not even visited before. Music is capable of crossing borders and impacting other music genres, which can even create new sounds with a combination of multiple cultures.

“Opinião” is a samba song that serves as a clear example of how Brazil uses its music as a voice for the lower class to express themselves in a society where they felt

oppressed. The lyrics state that “Podem me prender / Podem me bater / Podem, até deixar-me sem comer / Que eu não mudo de opinião / Daqui do morro / Eu não saio, não” (They can arrest me / They can beat me / They can even leave me without food / But I won't change my mind / I'm not leaving / This hill—no way)(Zé Keti, 1964), expressing their resistance and resilience. The lyrics also demonstrate their deep connection and pride to the “morro” (hill), referring to the Brazilians' urban place where they reside. The expression of “Eu não saio, não” (I'm not leaving) shows us that even through hard times and bad experiences they might have, their love for their nation is bigger than the hardships they encounter, and no matter what, they will not leave their land. Over time, music like this helped transform samba from a discredited genre into a symbol of Brazilian identity and celebration.

Lastly, samba and bossa nova show us how music is part of who we are. By combining rhythm with storytelling, these genres of music let Brazilians celebrate their culture, while also expressing their feelings and connecting to others. At the same time, their music allows listeners around the world to experience their culture, showing us how music can bring people together, and it can help others understand cultures better in other parts of the world.

## Jamaica's Reggae - The Sound of the Island

In Jamaica, the most well-known genre of music that has had an impact around the world has been Reggae. Its name possibly stems from "Rege-Rege," meaning "rugged clothes" in Jamaican slang, or the Latin word "regi," meaning "to the king."(African Music Library, n.d.)  Reggae was inspired by rhythms of earlier music in Jamaica, such as Ska and rock steady. Ska is characterized by its upbeat tempo,

inspired by American music such as rhythm and blues, which came out in the late 1950s. On the other hand, rock steady is known for its contrast in sound, offering a steadier, slow-paced sound with meaningful lyrics and its unique offbeat rhythm, which defines what reggae is today. Reggae emerged in the late 1960s in Kingston, Jamaica, and its lyrics often talked about the struggles and triumphs experienced by the people in its community. Besides this, this genre of music advocated for peace and resistance, which inspired global social movements worldwide (DeMello, 2024).

Some of the most outstanding elements of reggae are what its lyrics communicate. The genre became a medium to spread Rasta messages. The theme of reggae changed in the early 1970s from romantic to Rastafarian. The Rastafarian movement concerned themes of spirituality, rebellion, and social justice (Aïnouche, 2012). Through its lyrics, reggae started to talk about issues such as oppression and inequality. Many artists, such as Bob Marley, who ended up being one of the most influential people who took Reggae around the world, as well as other artists, including The Wailers, a band founded with Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer, and Larry Marshall, known for its most famous song “Nanny Goat” use their music to communicate political struggles regarding corruption and social injustices, while also encouraging unity, faith, and resistance among their community.

Rastafarianism, as an African liberation movement, was born of centuries of oppression at the hands of slavery and colonialism. Their beliefs consisted of their beliefs in God, the Ethiopian King, Haile Selassie I, also referred to as Jah. Rastas referred to Babylon as the white colonial system and the land of the oppressed, while Zion, also known as Ethiopia, is heaven, and the promised land of the chosen people. It

was believed that people were delivered from Babylon and returned to Zion, where they would finally be free (RE: ONLINE, n.d.). For this reason, Reggae became more than just entertainment; it became a cultural expression, exploring religious beliefs, experiences, and ideas, which introduced us to a different way of living.

Psychologically, its effect on people is profound. With its slower tempo and steady rhythm, this genre of music tends to have a positive impact on people and mental well-being. Studies say that Reggae can create a calming effect on people, which can reduce stress by lowering cortisol levels, boosting dopamine production, with dopamine being a chemical in the brain that makes us feel happy and encourages relaxation. Another list of positive effects on people is that it enhances the social community. Its primary topics being about love and togetherness, make people feel more connected to those around them (The Family Room Wellness Associates, 2025). At the same time, reggae lyrics touch on subjects that address real-life struggles, which makes listeners have a deeper connection to the songs they hear. This connection can create feelings of solidarity and empathy towards others who might be going through the same struggles, contributing to how people interact with those around them.

Reggae music in Jamaica has served as an expression of the struggles of its people, especially oppressed communities. A clear example of this is the song “Get Up, Stand Up” by Bob Marley where the lyrics state that,  “Preacher man don't tell me heaven is under the earth / I know you don't know what life is really worth / It's not all that glitter is gold / Half the story has never been told / So now you see the light… You stand up for your right” (Tosh & Marley, 1973). These lyrics challenge common traditional religious beliefs about life and death. The line “Preacher man don't tell me

heaven is under the earth “questions the common belief that religion tends to preach about, that heaven only exists once we pass away, making it a controversial message that is not for everyone. Through lyrics like this, Reggae can help its community express resistance as well as encourage education and raise awareness. As a result, songs like this not only show Jamaican society and their beliefs but also inspire movements all around the world rooted in freedom, awareness, and social change.

At the end, reggae shows us how music can be a powerful tool in shaping how we see other cultures and how people identify. Through its lyrics and the spiritual and societal messages on them, reggae allows listeners to reflect on social issues while also feeling connected to its community. For Jamaica, Reggae is more than music; it is the voice of the country that presents who they are at their core, their beliefs, and their resilience.

## South Korea's K-Pop Revolution

The entertainment industry in South Korea has not only had an impact on its culture but also on cultures all around the world. After the Korean War, which took place in 1950 to 1953, Park Chung- Hee took over, making the decision to focus only on industrialization and ignoring the entertainment industry. Only after his death in 1979 did Korea start to refocus on cultural exports.

This change did not have an impact right away. However, the success of films like Jurassic Park in 1993, with the making of almost one billion dollars in that year, shows the impact that the entertainment media can have on the economy. This alone inspired the Korean government to make more investments in media production.

Shortly after, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 took place, which led President Kim Young-Sam to invest more into the visual industry, such as K-pop, K-dramas, and Korean films, expanding its cultural influence worldwide.

As of 2019, South Korea's entertainment industry had grown into a major economic force, with a net worth of $10.3 billion US dollars. Today, Hallyu is one of South Korea's main exports, as of 2022, with Netflix also investing $1 million dollars in Korean content (7NEWS Australia, 2022). This worldwide popularity is what is known as soft power, being the ability to wield global influence simply through appeal and attraction.

Another economic factor impacted by K-pop has been tourism. Global travel platform Klook reported a 31.4 percent increase in traffic in k-tourism driven by gen-z and gen alpha to places such as Gyeongbokgung Palace or shopping districts as Myeong-dong (*South China Morning Post*, 2026). Research has also shown that K-pop has raised the influence for their audience to travel, mostly to the musicians' hometowns or countries, as well as shop and consume food in Korea, the music’s origin country. This highlights how music plays a significant role in fostering familiarity with the country of origin and driving intention to consume its products and to travel within the country. Kim also mentions that K-pop might not be limited to increasing tourists' shopping and travel, but it could also affect their overall familiarity with Korea and their willingness to consume Korean food (*Beyond the charts*, 2024). One impactful example occurred in 2019, when BTS, a K-pop boy band, brought approximately 187,000 foreign tourists to Seoul, generating over $790 million for the economy (CNBC International,

2020). This is another example of how music can serve more than just a form of art it can also have significant impacts on economic growth and attract tourism on a global scale.

Besides monetary effects that music has had in South Korea, it has also impacted the way people perceive their culture. Moments such as BTS giving a speech about their 'Love Myself' UNICEF campaign at the United Nations General Assembly made a diplomatic impact around the world. The Korean Government is aware of the impact that BTS has on its fans, especially the younger generation, also referred to as their ARMY. All around the world, these fans are very passionate about what BTS does. Not only do they follow their music, but also their identity. This strategy makes K-pop a tool that helps promote South Korea's culture, eventually leading to building stronger international ties and a positive worldwide reputation (UNICEF, 2018).

Another factor that has been impacted by K-pop is its beauty standards. K-pop stars have been idolized mostly because of their physical beauty, which is often achieved through unhealthy diets and plastic surgeries. Beauty standards consist of slim, petite bodies, pale and flawless skin, and a cute, young appearance. These characteristics seem to be almost impossible to achieve naturally (Parasari & Suarya, 2024). Most K-pop stars have undergone plastic surgeries to change the appearance of their face, and also strict diets where they eat close to no food. There have been instances where, while performing, music stars have fainted due to the lack of food (Cohen, 2024). This has raised some physical and psychological concerns for the younger generation. Physically, adolescents may undergo extreme dieting or cosmetic

procedures to try to achieve the desired look, which can lead to a negative impact on their health. Psychologically, adolescents may experience feelings of low self-esteem and dissatisfaction, as well as pressure to achieve their idol's look, leading to mental health issues such as eating disorders, anxiety, and depression (Parasari & Suarya, 2024). Not only do stars undergo pressure to look a certain way, but fans and future stars also feel pressured to achieve these unrealistic beauty standards, often affecting their identity and self-esteem.

Finally, K-pop is a clear example of how music is not only a form of expression and art, but it can serve as a tool that impacts a whole nation. Here, music serves as a source for economic expansion by driving tourism, when it comes to K-pop fans. Not only this, but by driving more tourists, it has also helped to contribute millions of dollars to South Korea's economy and create thousands of jobs. In 2020, BTS's single Dynamite was estimated to have contributed 1.4 billion dollars to Korea's economy and created 8,000 new jobs (CNBC International, 2020).

The success of the song Dynamite by the boy band BTS played a significant role in boosting South Korea's Economy. Released in 2020 as the group's first single completely in English, it was designed to help the band increase and reach a bigger global audience. ('Cause I, I, I'm in the stars tonight / So watch me bring the fire, and set the night alight (hey, set the night alight) / Shining through the city with a little funk and soul / So I'ma light it up like dynamite, whoa-oh-oh (whoo)) (BTS,2020). These lyrics have an uplifting message that resonated with its listeners during an unsettling time in history. The song's popularity helped them successfully reach the Billboards Hot 100,

increasing global attention of South Korea and its culture, leading to an increase in tourism, and a positive impact on its economic growth. Besides its economic impact, this song also provided comfort in a time when everyone was affected during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting how music not only impacts its nation's economy, but also societies around the world and their overall mood and mental well-being.

Besides the positive outcomes, K-pop also has negative impacts. The industry promotes high beauty standards, which most of the time cannot be achieved naturally. This can place pressure not only on idols but also on fans and aspiring artists. This pressure can lead to psychological effects such as low self-esteem, body image issues, and anxiety, since the expectations feel unrealistic to meet. As a result, while K-pop drives economic growth and global influence, it also raises some concerns about societal pressure and mental health.

**Puerto Rico's Urban Anthem - The Rise of Reggaeton**

Reggaeton is more than just a music genre; it is a defining rhythm of Puerto Rico’s culture. With its widely known upbeat rhythm and its controversial lyrics, Reggaeton, also known as underground, was influenced by a blend of dancehall from Jamaica, reggae en Español from Panama, and hip-hop from the United States. Its roots started in Panama when Jamaican workers helped build the Panama Canal, leading to Jamaican Reggae beats reaching Panama. After this, Panamanian artists like El General would mix Jamaican Reggae beats with Spanish lyrics, creating what was known as reggae en Español (Reggae in Spanish). Around the same time, hip-hop was growing in the United States. Artists from New York City would rap about social issues

concerning racism in their country, and by the 1990s, hip-hop as well as Reggae en Español would reach Puerto Rican Land, forming a type of music called underground (Zelazko, 2025).

As reggaeton kept evolving, artists like Daddy Yankee and Tego Calderon helped create a demand for reggaeton that went global (Rivera, 2025). Katelina Gata Eccleston, who worked on Spotify's *Loud* podcast, expresses how “Gasolina” proved to the industry that this music is not only fun, but it is marketable (Romo, 2023). Such a hit took reggaeton from being an underground genre in Puerto Rico to mainstream global success. With this success came its economic impact. Such a hit laid the groundwork for reggaeton to become an over a billion dollar in revenue industry in the United States. Latin music revenue hit an all-time high of $1.4 billion in 2024, marking the third consecutive year surpassing $1 billion. Furthermore, according to Billboard Hot Latin Songs Year-End Chart, over 50% of the top Latin songs heard in the United States originate from Puerto Rico since 2015 (Rivera, 2025).

Similar to South Korea, Reggaeton Music also helped Puerto Rico bring more tourism to its land. One of the most influential examples is the song “Despacito” by Daddy Yankee and Luis Fonsi, which gained massive global popularity. The music video shows us Puerto Rico's view, culture, and lifestyle through its music video. As a result, Puerto Rico has benefited from Despacito's popularity with its contribution to its rise in tourism. According to a report by Un Nuevo Dia, the number of tourists increased by 45% since the single became available on the radio and social media.  The increase in tourism helped Puerto Rico increase its revenue from hotels and other businesses, demonstrating how reggaeton had a direct impact on its economy (Tuncer, 2017).

Besides its economic impact, reggaeton has also influenced the social aspects of Puerto Rico, such as being a voice for women and challenging traditional gender roles within the genre. With a genre mostly male-dominated, reggaeton has played an important role in shaping how women are represented. One of the first and important influential forces has been Ivy Queen, also known as the “Queen of Reggaeton”, who started her journey in the mid 1990’s, and was the only female singer at the time in this genre. Her music and especially her song “Quiero Bailar” portrayed a different image of women, giving them a sense of empowerment. Instead of describing them as submissive, Ivy Queen, through her lyrics, has expressed how women can maintain control over their choices. This marked an important turn in the genre, opening doors for more female artists such as Becky G, Natti Natasha, Karol G, and Cazzu, are contributing to changes within feminism and the attitude towards women (Vilanova, 2023).

Reggaeton has also played an important role in normalizing Spanglish. Before this, mixing both Spanish and English was seen as negative and as an impediment to being fluent in those two languages. However, as reggaeton gained popularity, artists also began to speak this way, as well as mixing both Spanish and English in their lyrics. This new way of singing also helped shift perceptions, showing that Spanglish was not a wrong way of speaking but instead a creative way of communication connected to their identity. Based on research, reggaeton has contributed to people now considering the bilingual language use to be “cool”, when before it might have been stigmatized and considered as “ghetto”. As this genre of music became more popular throughout the world, it allowed speakers to embrace their bilingualism without judgment. This is a

reflection of how reggaeton not only has an economic impact, but also a social one that can affect how language is perceived, and how it can turn what was once criticized into a symbol of identity and Latin culture (Matachana López, 2026).

A clear example of a song that demonstrates the use of both English and Spanish seamlessly is “ I Like It” by Bad Bunny, Cardi B, and J Balvin, all of whom are Latin artists. Its smooth transition from “Tú compras to'a las Jordan, bo', a mí me las regalan (Hehe-he)” to “I spend in the club (wouh), what you have in the bank.. En Latino gang, gang, yeah” shows the blending of two languages, referred to as Spanglish. The way they use both of these languages shows the way many Puerto Ricans and Latinos communicate in everyday life. Such songs with global popularity helped normalize Spanglish by making this mixture of languages modern instead of incorrect or informal. At last, Reggaeton's popularity has changed the perception of bilingual speech, supporting the idea that mixing Spanish and English is not only normal but also a characteristic of Latin identity (Matachana López, 2026).

Finally, reggaeton is a clear example of how one genre of music can go from underground to a global phenomenon. This genre has not only made a positive economic impact in Puerto Rico through its recognition and tourism, but it has also reshaped culture and has given a voice to artists to express their language. From influencing how females are represented through artists like Ivy Queen to normalizing bilingual language, reggaeton continues to affect how Puerto Rico is perceived both nationally and internationally. Showing us once again how one genre of music can have a major impact on a nation.

## Beyond the Melody - Lasting Thoughts on Music and Culture

This research paper highlights the many effects that music has on people and societies. Today, music is not only entertainment, but it is a communication tool that speaks of our struggles, our identity, and social change. Across the world, music has shaped entire generations, influencing how people are, and making what only music is, a long-lasting part of cultural identity. Every time we listen to a song, we can ask ourselves how it has affected us as a society and on a personal level. Music is used to celebrate, to grieve, to motivate, or to release emotions, showing us multiple ways that music can be used.

Throughout this paper, we can see that music has both positive and negative impacts on society. On one hand, music can impact national economic growth as we see with South Korea's entertainment industry and the influence that K-pop has all over the world. On the other hand, it can also affect people negatively, such as putting pressure on upcoming K-pop stars and their fans to look a certain way or follow strict diets that can affect their overall health. Being aware of such things can help us be conscious of the massive influence that music can have on people's behavior, identity, and emotions. Another example of this is hip-hop music in the United States and how it became a voice for oppressed communities. It allowed them to express how they felt about being treated differently and the challenges they encountered, which contributed to a change for the better.

When looking back at these countries, we can see that there are connections, similarities, and differences in the impact that music has on cultures. For example,

Reggae in Jamaica traveled to Puerto Rico along with hip-hop and influenced what is now known as reggaeton, showing us how music genres travel around the world and produce new genres. Besides this, we should also consider how many of these artists made their songs because of their passion for music or as a way to express how they felt, without realizing the long-term impact that their work would have. With this, we can say that music is more than just entertainment; it has become a tool capable of making cultural change.

In conclusion, music is more than just sound; it is a medium that influences people's emotions, shapes cultures and standards worldwide. It has helped entire nations with their economic growth, as well as improving the rights of minorities. Even when unaware of it, music has always shaped people's perception of the world around them and also the way they experience life. While some songs might be remembered as hits, we should also recognize them for their impact on society and the changes they have made in the world.

## My Personal Reflection

I chose to research this topic due to my interest in music since I was young. At first, my interest was focused on the rhythm of the music and how it could improve my mood, but with time, I realized that it was more than that. Based on The urban music scene.com (2025), melodies and lyrics often bring back vivid memories, explaining how music became a way to reconnect with my childhood, helping me remember specific moments, places, and emotions. This research helped me understand that not only I, but people all around the world, would have experiences with music.

Music also became meaningful to me during one of the most challenging times in my life, which was moving from Mexico to the United States at 10 years old. When I arrived in the United States, I did not have any friends, barely knew anyone, and struggled to communicate because I did not speak any English. During this time, I felt alone and used music as my escape. No matter what I was doing, I would always listen to music. Listening to music would tend to change my mood and make me feel better, helping me escape reality for at least a moment.

At the same time, music became a very important tool for me to learn. Since no one in my family spoke English to me, I depended on music to learn the language. I would listen to songs in English, especially with one of my favorite artists at the time, Adele, look up the lyrics, translate them into Spanish, and then practice singing them in English. This not only helped me understand the language but also improved my pronunciation. Remembering this reminds me that music helped me more than I imagined during this time; it supported me academically and emotionally while also helping me adapt to a new way of living.

Even if my passion for music began while I was still a kid, it deepened as I got older. At around 15 years old, I got my first guitar and started learning how to play. All these experiences made me realize that music was more than just entertainment or an escape, but it was something that truly made me happy. It helped me through difficult moments, it helped me learn a new language, and it has always positively influenced my overall mood. Over time, it became something I wanted to continue to learn about and understand on a deeper level. It became more than just music; it became a way to express myself and help me grow into a stronger and more confident person.

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