# EL JALEO

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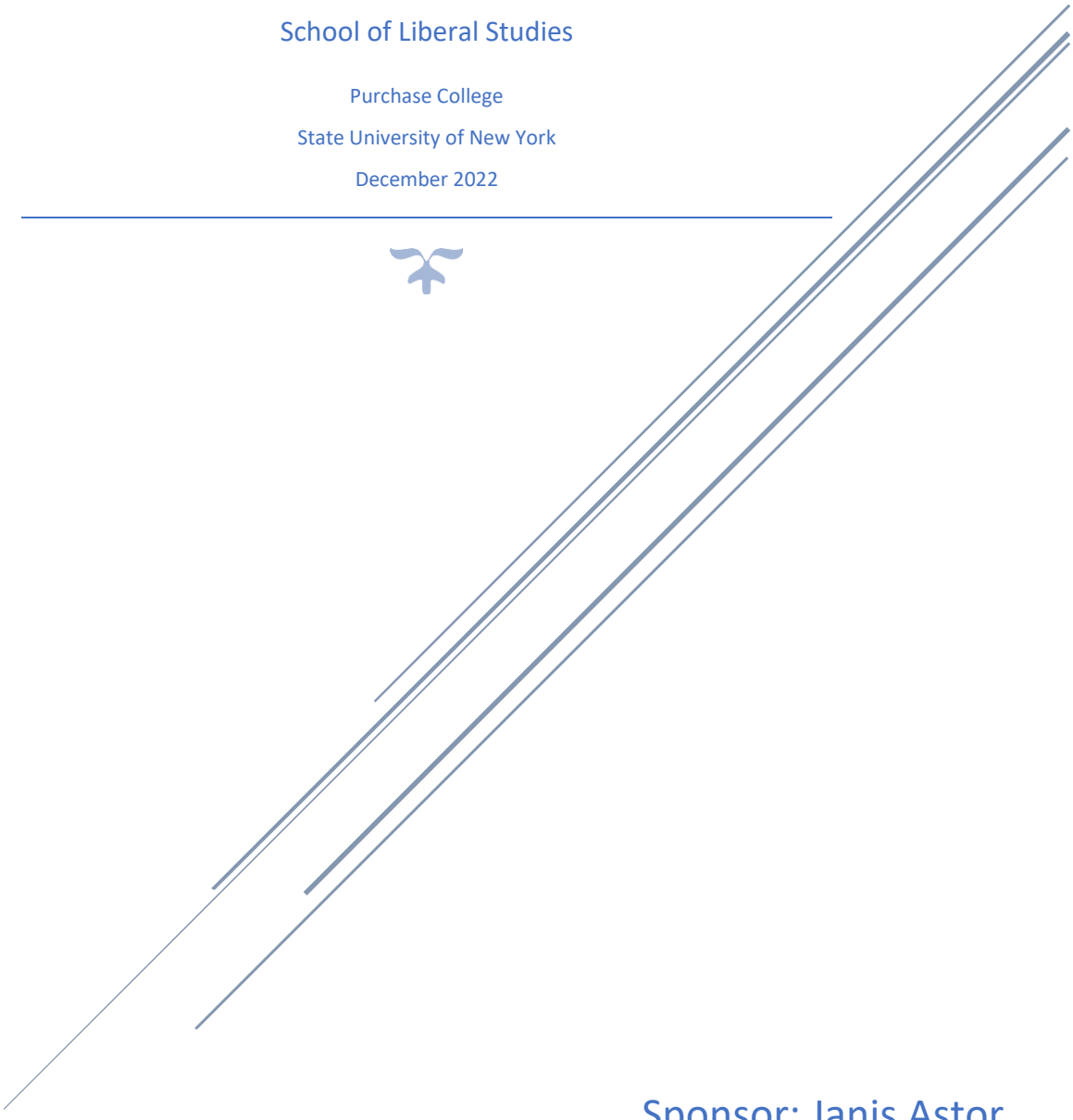

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## Introduction

Reggaeton is a genre of music that's been in debate for many years due to its musical lyrics and controversial topics. I grew up in a melting pot surrounded by different cultures and musical opinions. My mother didn't like me listening to this kind of music, but my Godbrother and I would bump our heads to the beat. Presently my thoughts on this subject are neutral, I don't love it or hate it, I guess I like it? I wanted to educate myself and others on the reason why reggaeton is considered music. This paper will give us an understanding of how reggaeton came to be and why many enjoy it. Is it the beat? The lyrics? Let's find out.

When you hear a song, you listen to the melody it brings, and the way it makes you feel. Then you listen to the lyrics, what does the artist mean? How do they portray their feelings? Can you relate to them? Underscoring these questions is one especially contentious genre of music: Reggaeton. It started as a form of underground music in the early 1990s that was only played at clubs, but as the music started to become popular it became known to the public. People who heard it on the radio had mixed feelings; most of them thought it was inappropriate since it contained violent and controversial topics. Now in the year 2022, it has been one of the most popular genres listened to in the world. Why is that? Why are people listening to this style of music? Do they know its meaning, or do they like the way the melody makes them feel?

## The Birth of Reggaeton

To understand the concept of reggaeton we'd have to travel back to when the Panama Canal was being made. The Panama Canal is a man-made waterway that connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It was made for ships to travel in either direction creating a shortcut instead of going all around the south American continent. Under the leadership of President Theodore

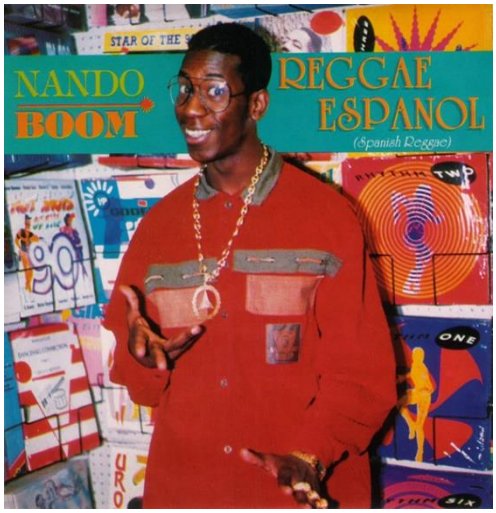
Roosevelt back in 1904, the Panama Canal was made after the French failed to build it. Many laborers were made up of Afro-Caribbean workers that came from the West Indies alongside other races. With a rough estimate of 28,000 deaths and 32 years of construction, the Panama Canal was completed in 1914 (World).

The West Indies, often known as the Caribbean, is not a country but a combination of Islands from Cuba all the way to Barbados. If you were to look at a map it would remind you of a crescent-shaped moon. "The West Indies are not a country. They are a crescent-shaped group of islands more than 2,000 miles (3,200 kilometers) long separating the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, to the west and south, from the Atlantic Ocean, to the east and north" (Britannica). They're a tropical set of Islands with warm temperatures that range to about 80F. In the early 1990s, the style of reggae was popular in the West Indies and was introduced during the making of the Panama Canal. Even though the birthplace of reggaeton was not in Panama it was a start to what would soon become one of the most popular genres of music to this day.

Without the West Indians, Panamanians wouldn't have created a new sound of music merging reggae and dancehall music into one. "The blending of different genres focused in particular on Afrocentric forms, which reflected the demographic of the West Indian immigrants. By mid-century, for example, Panamanian music reflected the incorporation of Afro-Cuban rumba, mambo, and cha-cha-cha" (Samponaro). It was the start of what would form the style of reggae music. "With such consciousness, Panamanians of the 1970s merged Colombian cumbia with Trinidadian Soca, Jamaican reggae, calypso, and Haitian kompa, and in the process created the first Latin American reggae recordings" (Samponaro). The style of reggaeton music mixed many cultures into one. The music developed in the late 1980s when it was combined with hip-hop and reggae as well as dancehall music.

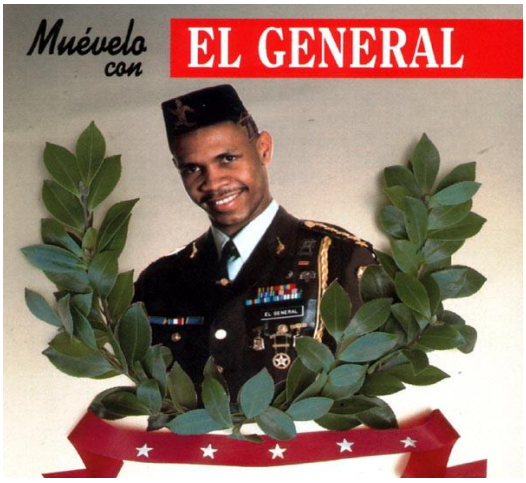
To give you a better understanding of reggaeton, I have provided you with a set of links so you can listen to the examples of rhythms that inspired reggaeton. 7 Afro Cuban Rhythms for Drum Set - YouTube. The first YouTube link will help you hear the difference between Afro-Cuban style rhythms. Trinidad Soca Groove - Drum Grooves - Dave Simmons - Island Grooves - 09 - YouTube. The Trinidad Soca link will directly take you to a brief example of variations of some reggae grooves. Jamaican DJ/Sound Boy/ Toasting/ Early 80s - YouTube is an example of Jamaican reggae and dancehall music in one. Joe Cullen Basic Calypso Drum Beat HD - YouTube this last link is showing you some calypso beats. Now the reason it's important to listen to all these links is so that you'll be able to understand the basic sound foundations that reggaeton was inspired by.

Nando Boom & El General




*(Photo Nando Boom)*

One of the Godfathers of reggaeton music, Fernando Brown, is most known as “Nando Boom.” Born in Panama, Nando Boom used tropical sounds to merge reggae and soca rhythms to create a new style of music. Boom, would grab the lyrics of reggae music and translate it into Spanish or English. His song “Mujeres” was one that broke record sales, and it changed the spectrum of reggae and dance fusions, that genre of music became known as Dem-Bow. Nando Boom - Mujeres - YouTube, here is a link to his hit song. Nando Boom and his mash-up of the reggae genre inspired many artists to mess around with reggae music and see what new style of music they could come up with.



*(El General)*

Nando Boom’s style of music became very popular and heard all over the Caribbean but the artist who molded it into the style of reggaeton was El General. Born and raised in Rio Abajo, Panama, Edgardo A. Franco, also known as El General, started singing and composing songs at the age of 12. He moved to the US after getting a scholarship and became a professional accountant (All music). Thankfully he realized that music was his passion, his first record “Tu Pum Pum” was a huge hit mixing reggae, dem-bow, and Latin rap by clicking the following link you’ll be able to hear his hit Tu Pum Pum - El General Produced by Michael Ellis 1989 - YouTube. Unfortunately, many seem to forget El General’s impact on the molding of reggaeton music. “His music was the perfect soundtrack to block parties, weddings, and clubs across Latin

America and Latinx communities in the United States. It was addictive and facilitated interaction between the sexes. El General was there to fill the awkward silence with sweaty dancing" (Cepeda). Although El General's impact was not known to many he did influence and acknowledge many of the artists that we know today.

Puerto Rican musicians heard this new sound of music, and it influenced their hip-hop styles. They started to add more of a "Boom- Chi- Boom" style that would be one of the very important foundations of reggaeton music. Puerto Rico had more success with promoting and marketing this style of music. "Increasingly in the southwest United States, as elsewhere, however, reggaeto´n from Puerto Rico is considered the authentic representation of the genre, due to the massive commercial success enjoyed by this variant since the turn of the century" (Samponaro). It is why, when you ask, "Which country did reggaeton originate from?" many will say, Puerto Rico.

## The Upbringing

Diversity must play a huge part when talking about the reggaeton upbringing. This style of music was considered a minority style of the genre and it was commonly associated with Black and Hispanic communities since its roots are reggae and dem-bow. This style of music was a way for Afro-Latinx people to create their own identity in culture to prove their dominance in society. I can't stress this enough, but this style of music was shunned by the public, specifically, the white public. Puerto Rico is a small Caribbean Island (a territory of the United States) with a mix of many races of Afro-Latinos, white Latinos, and indigenous people. Many of the Latinos who considered themselves white did not want to identify with reggaeton. They thought the music was too offensive and violent and they would rather stay clear of it.

When reggaeton was becoming popular among the barrios of Puerto Rico many related to it. Many of the youth saw it as an opportunity to express their thoughts and emotions and troubles. "It depicted the troubles of inner-city life with sexually-charged content and explicit lyrics about drugs, violence, poverty, friendship and love. It was found threatening and deemed immoral and artistically-deficient" (Music Origins Project). Even the Puerto Rican police had to launch a campaign against this form of music. Wearing baggy clothing and distributing bootleg cassettes of reggaeton music was banned in schools. That did not stop many, thanks to the help of the marquesinas -- a fancy word for carports or garages. It was where many would show up and vibe, listening to reggaeton.

La Perla, an impoverished neighborhood in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, had a club that was created specifically for reggaeton. The Noise is legendary for not only its club name but for the people who came out of that club and for being recognized for their music. Daddy Yankee started singing on that stage at the age of 16, and many artists like Tego Calderon and Nicky Jam also had an opportunity to sing on that stage (Music Origins Project). By the late 1990's many DJs would be hostile towards one another during the "underground" era of reggaeton music. While playing in the clubs every DJ would have their singers and their gang members by their side while they were on stage. Many of these fights would break out and it started to add more discredit to reggaeton. The music war came to end when a lot of these singers started signing up with record companies and started to make their careers with the public.

It wasn't until this genre of music became more accepting as a Latinx culture pushing away from the Black culture. "The genre finally became more widely accepted within the white population of Puerto Rico when it started to be associated with Latinx identity rather than just Black identity. This shift can be heard through heavier influences of traditional Latin American

music" (Flynn). This was the start of "Blanquemiento" meaning moving away from black influences. Listen to "Sin Parar" by Wiso G Sin Parar 🛹 - Big Boy / Wiso G [Video Oficial] - YouTube and then compare it to "Me Porto Bonito" by Bad Bunny ft. Chencho Corleone Bad Bunny (ft. Chencho Corleone) - Me Porto Bonito (Video Oficial) | Un Verano Sin Ti - YouTube. Pay attention to the beats, the instrumentation, and the lyrics, key elements in the change from a song from 1994 (Sin Parar) to a song in 2022 (Me Porto Bonito).

Controversies and Themes

I debated between separating the themes and controversies as their own subject but at the end of the day, it's because of the themes that there is controversy. So here we go.

The style of reggaeton is mostly contextualized as sexual music, that's why you would see a good portion of men singing this genre of music. The controversy is, that it shows their dominance and that they're considered the Alpha in the relationship; it's also another way of saying that their masculinity shouldn't be undermined. When you have a woman singing this style of music it would be based on tempting the other sex. "The comparatively few female artists in the genre have reinforced the male-centered culture by offering submissive, and even hyper, sexuality for a man to tame" (Samponaro). This is a topic that has been debated for a long time.

Sex is one of the more popular themes in reggaeton. From the 1990s Old School to the early 2020s New School, the style of instrumentation has changed drastically by blanqueamiento as mentioned previously, but the one thing that doesn't seem to change is the themes that need to be sung. "Reggaeton is a cultural pillar for many artists who use it to communicate daily struggles in their neighborhoods while focusing on themes like poverty, love, sex, drugs, and crime" (Mercado).

A topic that has been popular and most recent is racism. Not by what the artist sings but by their actions being looked upon. The most popular mainstream artist tends to pivot away from reggaeton and its Black Identity and is dominated by white or light-skinned Latinos. “Fans and critics have for years urged reggaeton, now overwhelmingly dominated by White or light-skinned Latinos, to acknowledge and honor its Black roots. The backlash to the reggaeton community’s uneven response amid a heightened movement around racial justice brought that desire into renewed focus. It marks a pivotal moment for the once-underground genre, which has become a force in contemporary pop music” (Butler).

Many want modern reggaetón artists to speak about Black Lives Matter and believe they should move away from their modern style. “Reggaeton and its offshoots — including Latin trap — grew out of Black music genres including reggae, dancehall and rap. Reggaeton is inherently Black and inherently political: poverty, racism, police violence and the genre’s own criminalization were persistent themes in the genre’s early days, anchored by Afro-Latino pioneers including Tego Calderón, Ivy Queen and reggae en Español legend El General” (Butler). Once people saw the majority of these artists were no longer talking about poverty or crime it started to change the whole spectrum of how people would view these artists.

*J Balvin, Daddy Yankee, Bad Bunny*

Gasolina


*Gasolina*

"Ella le gusta la gasolina!" "¡Dame me mas gasolina!" "¡Ella le encanta la gasolina!" "Dame mas gasolina!" in other words "She likes the Gasoline, Give me more Gasoline!" A six-year-old was introduced to this song in 2007, as everyone was playing this on their radios in 20. Newscasters made references to this song. Everyone and their moms heard this song. It was turning heads when this would play on the car radios driving by. Daddy Yankee - Gasolina (Video Oficial) - YouTube. A song with a double entendre talking about energy independence or human sperm however you'd like to interpret it as (Lemons). Although this song was released in 2004 it was a hit that change the reggaeton spectrum. "The set debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's Top Latin Albums chart July 31, 2004, the first reggaeton album to hit that spot. It eventually became the top-selling Latin album of 2005 and the entire decade. Because so few Spanish-language stations played urban music at the time, *Gasolina* never rose past No. 17 on Billboard's Hot Latin Songs chart. But it got heavy airplay on mainstream stations — peaking at No. 32 on the Hot 100 — and its dembow beat carried over to Latin America, Europe and the Far East" (Cobo).

This song revived a dying genre and helped many others with their musical career not only within the reggaeton genre but within the sales of Latin Music. Many artists started to

have a name by mixing reggaeton with other genres such as Luis Fonsi, Daddy Yankee and Justin Beiber and the hit song “Despacito” Luis Fonsi, Daddy Yankee - Despacito ft. Justin Bieber - YouTube spreading reggaeton worldwide.

*Bad Bunny*

El Conejo Malo

A Vast majority of the public has heard or recognized who he is. He is “Bad Bunny” or “El Conejo Malo” or maybe you know him by his birth name “Benito Martinez Ocasio.” He is a popular icon within the Hispanic community, and he also dropped an album earlier this year 2022, it has truly been a hit surpassing any previous Spanish albums within the billboard charts. “It’s not just a chart-topping, record-breaking album, it’s an era-defining moment in pop” (Raygoza). Now imagine Daddy Yankee compared to Bad Bunny’s numbers, that’s crazy.

Bad Bunny has been an artist that many look up to because he is redefining stereotypes and music, especially reggaeton. He is a kid that wants best for his Puerto Rican people and supports the LGBTQ+ community. He even commissioned for Black Lives Matter to be painted across murals of Puerto Rico. The best way to describe Bad Bunny is that he wants best for

everyone, but many condemn him for his explicit lyrics and his behavior. It's to say that his lyrics are bad influences for teens by containing many sexual phrases and curses and very inappropriate (Lainez). Although others are inspired by the music provided and felt encouraged to be themselves "For his fans, his unabashed pride for Latino communities and the Spanish language, defiance of traditional gender norms and push for justice on a range of social issues, also makes him a de facto political icon" (Venkataramanan).

He speaks out for the Puerto Rican community and in his video Bad Bunny - El Apagón - Aquí Vive Gente (Video Oficial) | Un Verano Sin Ti - YouTube he talks about the serious topics with what is going on within the Island. "His new music video for his hit "El Apagón" ("The Blackout") documents the island's ongoing housing, electricity and corruption crises five years after Hurricane Maria" (Venkataramanan). Although his Island heritage is something Bad Bunny takes pride in, he wants fans to recognize the serious problems in Puerto Rico but to also take pride in being Latino. He wants Latinos from all over the world to take pride from where they're from.

Remember that controversial topic I was talking about and male dominance especially within the reggaeton music? Well Bad Bunny doesn't agree with that. "He's really combating the stereotypical norms that Latino men usually have in our community," said Juan Diego Mazuera Arias, a 24-year-old Colombian American graduate student. "And I think for Latino men, it just, in a way, opened the doors to being more comfortable with your sexuality, whether you are straight, or gay or bi or pan" (Venkataramanan). When looking at many of his videos you don't see Bad Bunny wearing a suit and tie, he is seen wearing a crop top and a skirt. He is not saying that he is straight nor gay he just wants you to feel comfortable with who you want to be.

Interview

I asked a family member who wanted to remain anonymous to help me out with the topic of reggaeton. They immigrated to the United States at the age of 17 with no knowledge of reggaeton, and in here in the US he was introduced to this new style of music. At the age of 18 they would attend this auto club in Brooklyn and would consistently attend parties listening to reggaeton. Sometimes they would go out to this club in Queens called “La Boom” with his friends and there he saw all these mainstream artists that at the time weren’t famous like, Alexis y Fido, Tego Calderon, Plan B and Daddy Yankee.

They enjoyed listening to reggaeton for the beat and related to it for being “vago” which in translation means lazy, but in their definition, it means going out with friends and vandalizing the streets. On the other hand, they thought the impact of reggaeton was to do bad and to do drugs. Their example of “Sacala” by Hector El Father, Hector El Father - Sácala "Intro" (Official Video) ft. Wisin & Yandel, Don Omar & Naldo - YouTube talks about taking out your gun and shooting your enemy and that’s what set off many gang wars. They stated “It made many mad and wanted to seek revenge, from what I saw. I stayed clear of all that but the people around me didn’t” (Arellano).

So, it spiked me to ask them another question, what were their thoughts on reggaeton music? They responded with, “It mainly disrespects the ladies, and the lyrics offend women, other countries prohibited this kind of music like certain parts of Mexico.” Eventually I had to look up to make sure he wasn’t lying and “According to local reports, the music ban is due to the lyrics and subject matter in many of the songs. Raggaeton, it has been deemed, fail to relate to heroism and independence as well as failing to project a family image” (Latin America Reports). So it seems like they know their facts about reggaeton.

Continuing with their interview, “Nowadays women don’t care if this kind of music talks about them in a vulgar way and maybe that’s why they’re so popular. Also, it’s more inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community because of Bad Bunny and now anyone can listen to this kind of music. The future is that I think that we’re headed towards with reggaeton is going to be basura (garbage). It is offending many women and that style of music is now overrated and shouldn’t be listened to anymore. Reggaeton nowadays ruins the minds of the children that speak Spanish and they’re learning all these bad words that we aren’t teaching them. What kind of society are we living in? You tell me because I don’t know anymore.”

My Project

The proposal of my project was to understand the reason of why do people listen to reggaeton, knowing the context and controversy it brings? What do you feel? What do you want to do when you listen to this kind of music? Why do you listen to this kind of music? So, the best way to get people input was to host a party and to lure them in by playing reggaeton, simple, right? There was pressure on me by just having that thought. Many thoughts flooded my mind like where am I going to host it? Who is going to help me out? What am I going to bring? Are people going to even show up?

First thing that came in mind was to ask for help and support and what better than the Latinx Club? One of the only clubs that represent the Hispanic community here on campus. I contacted the president via Instagram and was able to set up a meeting with them and their secretary. Personally, I didn’t feel prepared for the meeting even though I was going with a purpose and knew what I wanted. The meeting went well they wanted me to find a venue and a date and to come up with a proposal, so that led me to the following.

I had to start with the basics, the venue. My go to thought was “The Stood” a popular location were many Purchase students go to hang out and party. It was hard to communicate with the person in charge but eventually I was able to have a Zoom call with them. After many technical difficulties I was able to set up a date and that gave me a chance to find my DJ. I set up flyers all over campus but unfortunately no one reached out. I also contacted a Purchase alumni that my senior project sponsor told me about, but they were also busy the weekend of my event. I wasn’t going to sulk, so I had to think of a plan B and that was when I decided to hire someone to make a mix for me.

Once I had a venue and date, I sent my proposal back to the Latinx club email. After many days no one responded so I reached out, but still no response. I have lost my main support, the club in which I thought was going to bring me most of my guests. What made this matter difficult was being a commuter. I wouldn’t be able to go to campus on the days when they met because it was on Tuesday evening, and I had to go to work the next day. Maybe my outcome could’ve been different if I skipped a day of work and stayed on campus to attend the club. I could’ve spoken to them in person and maybe I would’ve had my support. I’m thinking out loud but not too bad of an idea, maybe for next time.

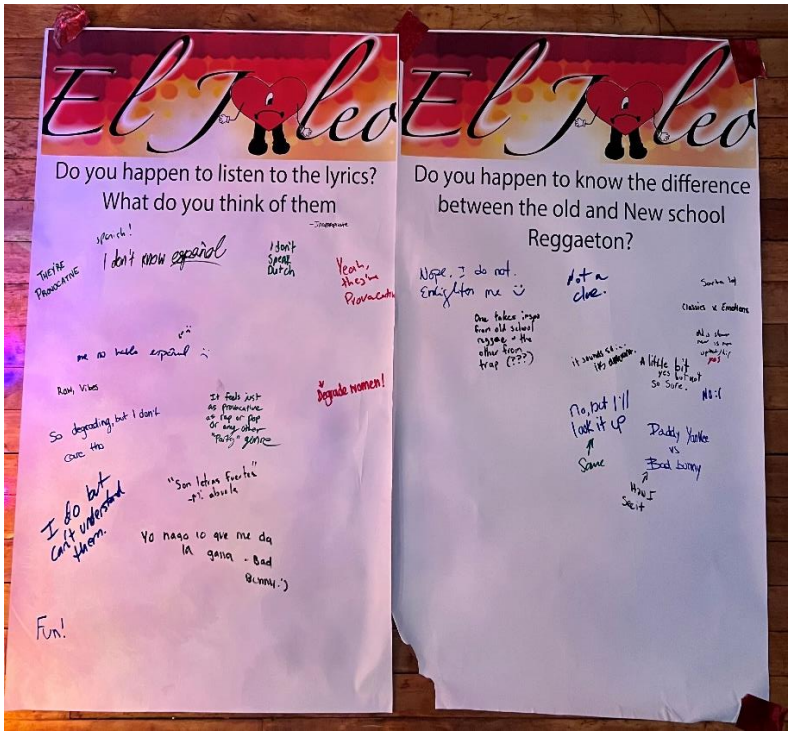
The week of the event, my plan was to promote it, ideally the place to go would be “The Hub” during lunch time. It’s one of the most visited places on campus when you’re starving and want decent food. So, I was going to stand by the entrance with the poster I made and hand out flyers while playing reggaeton music through my speaker. I am one of the most outgoing people out there and that plan sounded great in my head. There was one problem, and my challenge was, fear. I was terrified in moving out of my chair from the library. I didn’t want to move and at the end I didn’t promote my event the way I wanted to. That moment really made me think about the

outcome of my event. I was scared and I didn't want to feel disappointed by inviting that many people and having no one. I thought the best thing for me was to steer clear of getting my feelings hurt and let fear dominate me. Not to sound very dramatic, but if I wasn't terrified of getting up from my chair and going to promote it like I would've then their possibly could've been more people at my event.

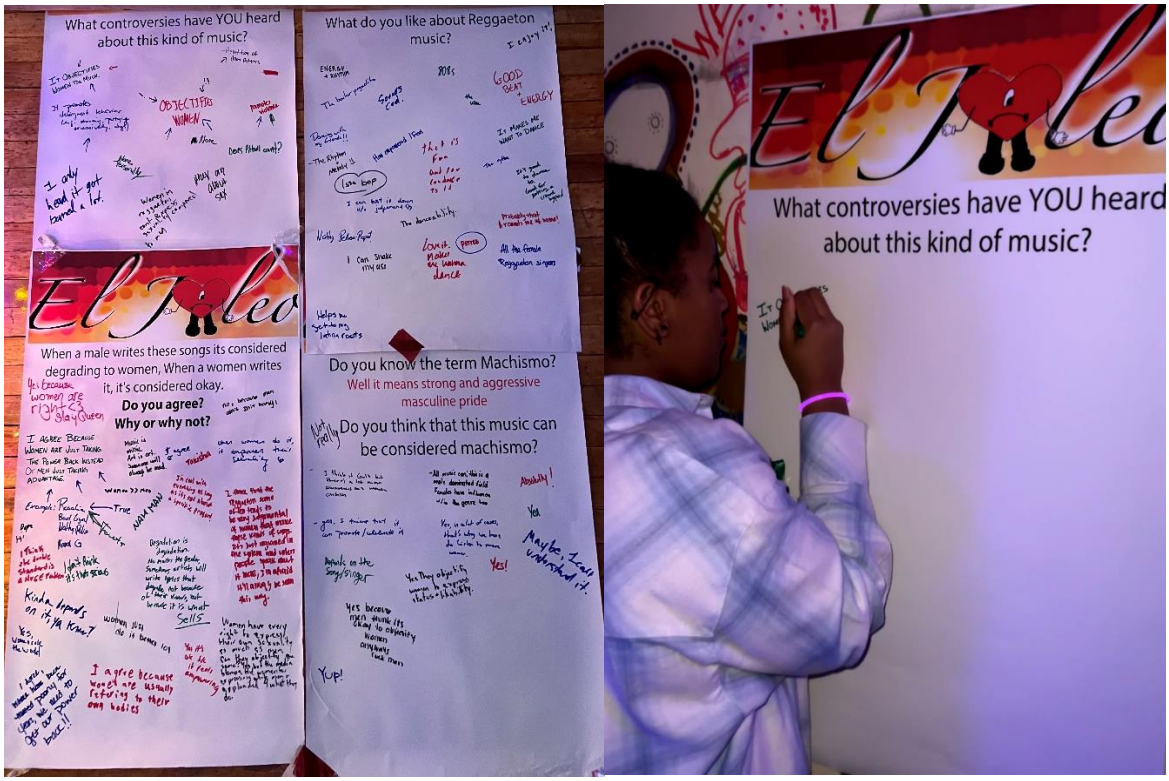
The day of the party had arrived and I had to depend on luck. I was lucky my friends were there to help set up the whole thing. I placed posters all around the room with questions I wanted the guests to fill out and I had someone to help me with the sound system so no need to worry about where the music was going to be playing. I had a table set up with snacks and beverages, all thanks to my sponsor and I bought some glowsticks to make the night a bit more memorable. I would put glowsticks around their wrists to help the guests see what they were writing on the questionnaires; also the room was dark even with the light provided. The event started at 9pm but no one showed except my friends and two girls who stayed for the whole thing. Luckily there was emo night next door and around 10:30pm more and more trickled in. Thanks to Emo night I was able to have a dance floor filled with people dancing and it made me happy seeing that.

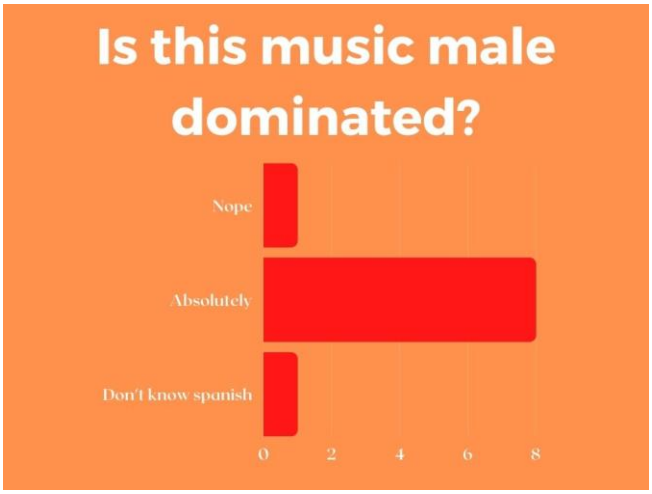
I was supposed to end my event around 11pm but many didn't want it to end. My friend even predicted that was going to happen. I'm glad her prediction came true because once my mix hit the 2-hour limit many of the people from the dance floor were suggesting songs to be played. Shout out to the tech help Ethan for staying a little while longer and queuing the suggested songs from his Spotify. Around 11:30 pm it started to die down and I was able to finish my event packing everything up and leaving with a smile on my face.

Down below I have some photos of the event.

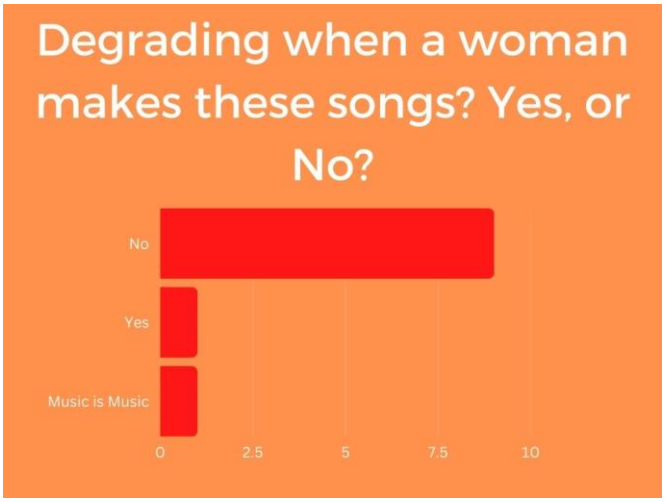


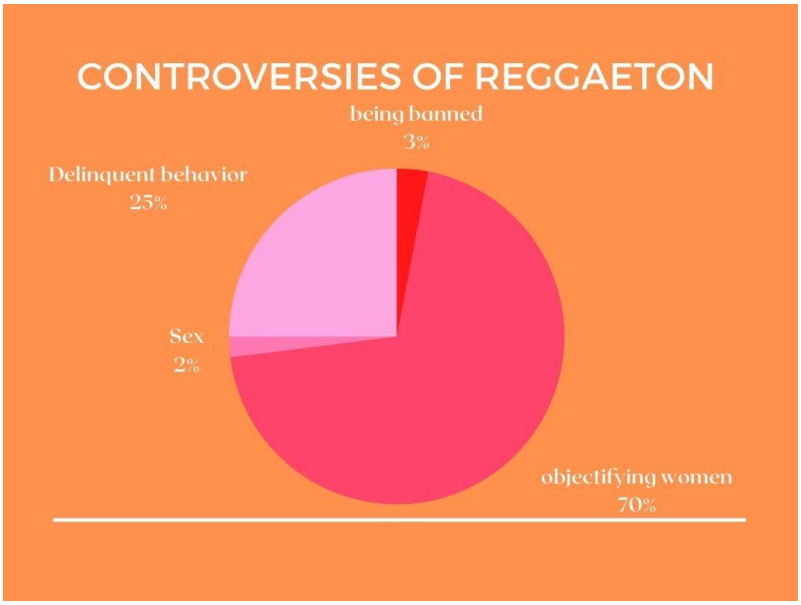

*Here are some examples of the questions I asked and the responses the guest wrote.*



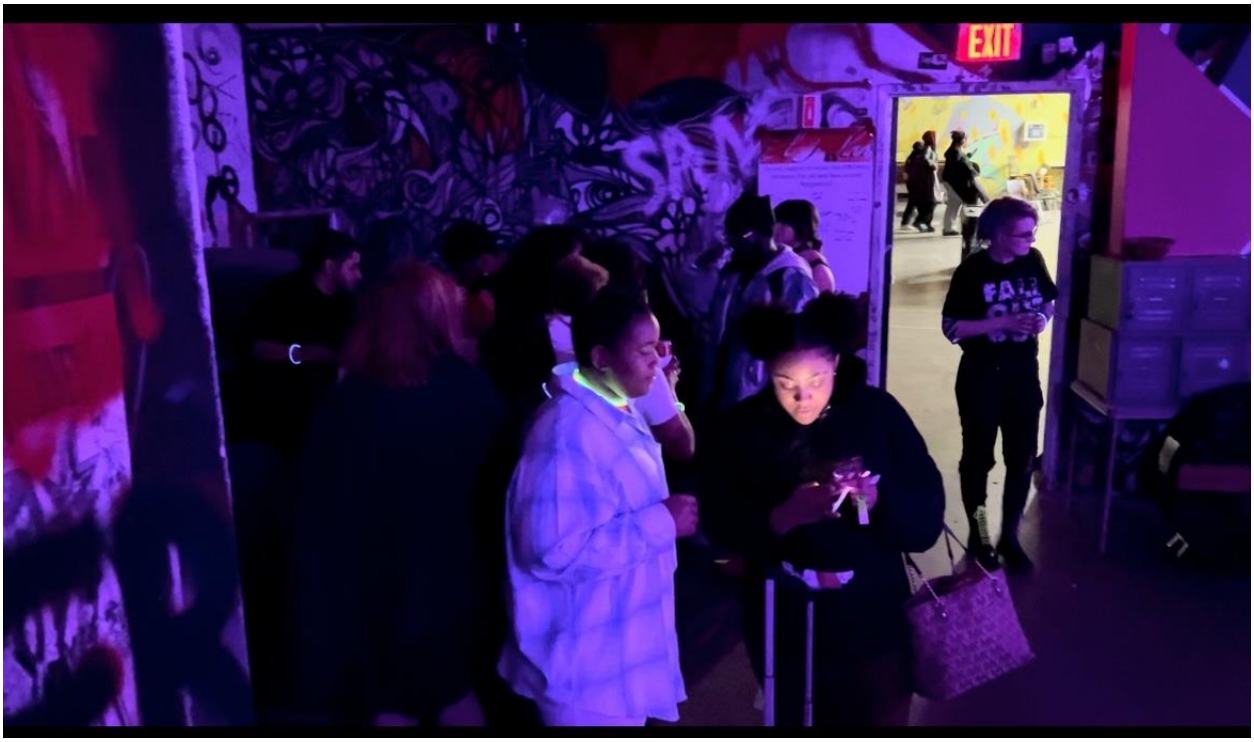



*I took the liberty of making a graph of some of the questions asked on the night of my event. As you can see many participated and I did a rough estimate of the responses.*




*Photos the night of the event*



Conclusion

I was able to come up with the notion that many people listen to reggaeton as a form of dance and the beat is what draws them in. The rhythm that gets you pumping and make you move your body to the music being played is what makes you feel alive. Unfortunately, from what I understood with the responses of my event, is that not many cares for the lyrics and at the end of the day they only care about the dance beat or that they just don't understand it.

It is interesting to learn all these new facts about this history of reggaeton and to learn from an old timer about their experience with reggaeton. My opinions still haven't changed about the way I feel with this kind of music. I personally believe that this music has many offensive lyrics, but the beat is what makes you want to dance. Reggaeton is something that many of my family and friends listen to and writing about this topic gives me the understanding of why they listen to it. I wanted to write about something that I didn't know much of and to help me answer my questions along with educating others. I am content with the results of my project. This genre of music is a huge representation of the Hispanic community and if they tend to disregard it what does that make Hispanics? Or does it mean some people are just willing to look the other way, even if it is offensive because they love the beat? Or does it mean patriarchal, sexist, misogynistic ideologies are so engrained that people are just willing to accept it? Is it ignorance or passiveness? Societal conditioning of male/ female roles? Well, that seems to be a topic for another day.

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