



SOUTH AMERICA

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El Super Tazón: Bad Bunny's Soft Power Moment

How his record-breaking halftime show projected Latin American identity on a global stage

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About the publication:



3 Main Points:

The briefing assesses how Bad Bunny's 2026 Super Bowl performance operates as an intervention in hemispheric power relations. It contends that his deployment of Spanish language, decolonial aesthetics and pan-Latino symbolism constitutes a form of counter-hegemonic soft power. It concludes that the performance reconfigures soft power as resistance from subaltern positions and reasserts Latin American agency within a neocolonial context.

Highlight Sentence:

“Bad Bunny turns the Super Bowl into a bold act of Latin American soft power, reclaiming an ‘All-American’ stage as a stunning display of decolonial resistance”

Definition:

Counter-hegemonic soft power denotes the use of cultural expression to contest prevailing geopolitical hierarchies and articulate agency from structurally subordinate positions.

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[El Super Tazón: The Use of Latin American Soft Power on the International Stage, the case of Bad Bunny at the Halftime Super Bowl](#)

Introduction

Contemporary U.S. political discourse is increasingly defined by the construction of the 'Other': a deliberate fragmentation of society rooted in the nostalgic reassertion of a monolithic, English-speaking national identity that erases the multicultural foundations upon which the country was built ([Nisbett, 2016](#)). It is within this climate of exclusion that Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, known globally as Bad Bunny, staged one of the most politically charged performances in the history of American popular culture. Just over a month after the U.S. military operation that apprehended Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, the most explicit manifestation yet of the reasserted Monroe Doctrine, Bad Bunny performed at the Super Bowl Halftime Show before a record-breaking 128.2 million viewers. What has historically functioned as a



celebration of "All-American" culture was, for the first time, challenged by a 30-minute Spanish-language performance saturated with Latin American symbolism, colonial memory, and political critique.

This essay takes that performance as its central case study, arguing that it constitutes a deliberate exercise of Latin American soft power: one that operates not through state diplomacy, but through cultural resistance from below ([Nye, 1990](#); [Almeida & González Márquez, 2023](#)). In a geopolitical moment defined by the "Donroe Doctrine", the Trump administration's explicit reassertion of U.S. hemispheric dominance, Bad Bunny used the world's most watched stage to highlight Latin America's unique identity, collective struggles and enduring presence in the international arena. Where imperial ambition seeks to silence, multiculturalism asserts itself. Where the Monroe Doctrine attempts to define the hemisphere, Bad Bunny redefines it.

Historical Context: From Monroe to "Donroe"

The Monroe Doctrine, far from being a protective shield for Latin American sovereignty, established the ideological foundation for the U.S.'s western hemispheric domination. Proclaimed in 1823, the Doctrine warned European powers against further colonization in the Americas. However, as Scarfi ([2020](#)) argues, it was systematically reframed throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to justify U.S. interventionism under the banner of pan-American solidarity. Its imperial logic became most explicit in 1898, when the U.S. seized Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines from Spain ([Scarfi, 2020](#)). The Monroe Doctrine, in other words, was never about the Americas, it was about American dominance over them.

Puerto Rico stands as the starkest embodiment of this contradiction. Though Puerto Ricans were granted citizenship in 1917, they were simultaneously denied voting rights in presidential elections and full congressional representation ([McGreevey, 2020](#)). This colonial legal limbo, as McGreevey ([2020](#)) documents, persists to this day. Far from a doctrine of mutual protection, Latin American states have historically



recognised it as an instrument of U.S. hegemony masquerading as regional solidarity ([Álvarez, 1917](#)), a reality that makes Bad Bunny's choice to open his Super Bowl performance emerging from sugar cane stalks not decorative, but deeply political.

Two centuries later, this imperial logic was explicitly revived. The Trump administration's National Security Strategy of December 2025 reasserted military presence in the region and framed access to Latin American energy and mineral resources as a U.S. security prerogative ([ODI, 2026](#)). Its primary pretext was countering Chinese influence: the strategy called to "reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to preserve U.S. preeminence in the Western Hemisphere and deny outside powers control of strategic locations and assets", language directed squarely at Beijing's Belt and Road investments across the region ([Zhang, 2026](#)). As Bethell ([2025](#)) traces, this move follows a long lineage of corollaries (Roosevelt's, Reagan's, Kennan's), each updating Monroeism to suit the threat of the moment. The difference in 2025 is one of brazenness: where previous administrations dressed as intervention in the language of democracy, this one does not bother.

The "Donroe Doctrine", a portmanteau of *Donald* and *Monroe*, was effectively named on January 3, 2026, following the U.S. military operation that apprehended Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, with the State Department posting publicly: "This is OUR Hemisphere." ([Rubio, 2026](#)) This statement, stripped of diplomatic language, makes explicit what Rodríguez & Huizar ([2016](#)) identify as the operative logic of U.S. colonial policy toward Latin America: "take it, own it, manipulate it, and exploit it". It is against this backdrop of renewed imperial ambition that Bad Bunny's Super Bowl performance demands to be read as something far greater than entertainment: a deliberate and defiant assertion of Latin American identity on the world's largest stage.

Soft Power as Resistance: Decolonising the Concept

Joseph Nye's foundational conceptualisation of soft power, defined as the capacity to shape the preferences of others through attraction rather than coercion, derived from a country's culture, political ideals and foreign policy ([Nye, 1990](#)) and provides a



useful starting point. Nye's framework has an inherent ideological bias: it treats American and Western cultural systems as the most attractive, which turns soft power into a liberal hegemonic theory whereby non-Western actors can only be deemed "successful" if they accept and emulate Western political and cultural values ([Nye, 2021](#)). Applied uncritically to the Latin American context, the concept risks reproducing the very hierarchies it purports to describe ([Nisbett, 2016](#)). This essay therefore proposes a decolonial reading of soft power: one in which cultural attraction operates not as an instrument of state diplomacy, but as an autonomous act of resistance from below.

Latin American music has a long tradition of functioning precisely in this way. As Almeida and González Márquez ([2023](#)) document, musicians across the region have historically constructed lyrics and musical styles that resonate with subaltern populations, articulating collective grievances in the face of state repression and neoliberal policy — what scholars call *música contestataria* ([Almeida & González Márquez, 2023](#)). Decolonial aesthetics in Latin American music operate through deliberate choices of language, genre, instrumentation and imagery that challenge and decenter dominant epistemes, constructing an independent and inclusive counter-narrative ([Almeida & González Márquez, 2023](#)). Bad Bunny's Super Bowl performance exemplifies precisely this tradition, transposing it onto the world's largest stage.

The Super Bowl stage became, for thirty minutes, something it had never been before, a site of deliberate cultural militancy. Each visual and musical choice, from the jíbaro imagery to El Apagón, functioned as a layer in a broader argument against colonial erasure and neoliberal neglect ([Almeida & González Márquez, 2023](#)). Performed almost entirely in Spanish before 128.2 million viewers, the show did not ask for inclusion within the dominant American cultural order, it challenged that order on its own terms. In doing so, Bad Bunny transformed soft power from a tool of hegemony into an instrument of resistance, a distinction the following section explores through the lens of pan-Latino solidarity and the contested meaning of "America."



Redefining ‘America’: Challenging Neocolonialism and Pan-Latino Solidarity

As a Puerto Rican artist, Bad Bunny occupies an interesting space of being a US citizen but not having political representation in Washington as a US territory ([Garrett, 2024](#)). Puerto Rico’s unique history of having been a Spanish colony to later becoming a US territory without political representation is deeply embedded in the island’s political identity, especially in contrast to the politics in Washington. The organisation of an alternative “All-American” halftime show by Turning Point USA (TPUSA) further fed into the discourse questioning Bad Bunny’s ‘Americanness’ ([TPUSA, 2026](#)), with the announcement that federal agents would be present at the Superbowl sending a clear warning to attendees ([Davis, 2025](#)). This conversation was ultimately rooted in a monoculturist view of the US stemming from its Anglo-Saxon dominated history. Closing his performance with a “God bless America” and “*seguimos aqui*” (we’re still here) Bad Bunny lists other (North and South) American countries, stressing the misnomer of ‘America’ as referring to the US, essentially erasing the rest of North America and the entire continent of South America while emphasising the collective resistance and strength of the community’s solidarity.

As a US commonwealth territory, Puerto Rico has a complicated relationship with the mainland. Bad Bunny has been vocal about the mismanagement of resources and rebuilding projects following Hurricane Maria, as well as the legacy of the island’s (neo)colonial history and the consequential systemic dependency on the US. The entire performance takes place within a constructed sugarcane plantation, a symbol of Puerto Rico’s. Singing *NuevaYol* (New York), Bad Bunny highlights the centrality of the Puerto Rican identity in New York city, where Puerto Ricans make up the largest share of the Hispanic population with 26.67% in 2014 ([Pew Research Centre, 2014](#); [Piña & Martinez, 2025](#)). Ricky Martin’s performance of the chorus of *Lo Que Le Pasó a Hawái* (What Happened to Hawai’i) warns against following the same path of colonisation that Hawai’i experienced as locals are pushed out and out-priced. Climbing line poles, Bad Bunny sings *El Apagón* (the Blackout), a song that calls out



the frequent power outages, the displacement of local Puerto Rican residents and government inaction to address the ongoing crises post-Hurricane Maria.

While pushing back and challenging the understanding of 'America,' Bad Bunny pays homage to pan-Latino solidarity throughout his halftime performance. The show is freckled with a long-list of Latin cultural elements, including traditional and modern dance from the region, street hawkers, a Catholic Latin wedding with children sleeping on chairs, among other symbols reminiscent of the day-to-day life of the Latin American community and diaspora. The iconic *casita* featured in Bad Bunny's *Debí Tirar Más Fotos* tour has been a staple of symbolising 'family' and the idea of being at home. Other Latin artists, including fellow Puerto Ricans Ricky Martin and Young Miko, Chilean-American actor Pedro Pascal, Colombian artist Karol G and Dominican-New Yorker Cardi B, joined him in his performance. These elements highlighted how Bad Bunny is recognised as someone who represents not only Puerto Rico's fight to protect its unique national identity, but also as a spokesperson of the shared struggle of Latin America in liaising with its regional superpower, the US.

At the same time, Lady Gaga, an Italian-American artist, performing alongside Bad Bunny offers a new dimension to the discussion of migrants and the 'American' identity. Italian-Americans faced similar discrimination, particularly in the 20th century, until they could move up the socio-economical ladder, losing their Italian identity along the way and be considered 'white,' albeit in a distinct manner to the dominant Anglo-Saxon 'white' identity ([Luconi, 2003](#); [Gardaphé, 2002](#)). Wearing the Maga flower and a flamenco dress, both symbols of Puerto Rico, while performing a salsa version of her song *Die with a Smile*, Lady Gaga's cameo in the performance highlighted the shared complex migrant histories of the Italian-American and Puerto Rican communities.

Conclusion

Bad Bunny's 2026 Super Bowl Halftime performance was, in every sense, a geopolitical act. Staged at the height of the "Donroe Doctrine", a moment of explicit U.S. reassertion of hemispheric dominance, a Puerto Rican artist took the most



"All-American" stage in existence and transformed it into a site of colonial memory, cultural pride, and political resistance. From the sugar cane fields to *El Apagón*, from the light blue independence flag to the closing recitation of Latin American nations, every element of the performance constituted what this essay has termed a decolonial exercise of soft power: cultural attraction deployed not in service of state diplomacy, but as an autonomous act of resistance from below ([Almeida & González Márquez, 2023](#); [Nisbett, 2016](#)).

This performance also exposed the limitations of Nye's (1990) original soft power framework. Bad Bunny did not seek to attract audiences by assimilating into Western cultural norms; he did the opposite, conducting an almost entirely Spanish-language performance before 128.2 million viewers without apology or concession. In doing so, he demonstrated that soft power need not flow from the hegemon outward; it can flow upward, from the periphery to the centre, challenging the very hierarchies that mainstream soft power theory takes for granted ([Nye, 2021](#)).

Beyond Puerto Rico, the performance articulated a broader pan-Latino solidarity, one that encompassed the Caribbean, Central and South America, and the diaspora communities that have long shaped U.S. culture while being denied full belonging within it. As Bad Bunny reminded his audience in closing: "*seguimos aquí*" — we are still here. In a political moment defined by the erasure of Latin American agency, that declaration was not merely cultural. It was, as Scarfi (2020) might argue, the latest chapter in a long history of Latin American resistance to U.S. hegemony, this time, performed before the entire world.

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