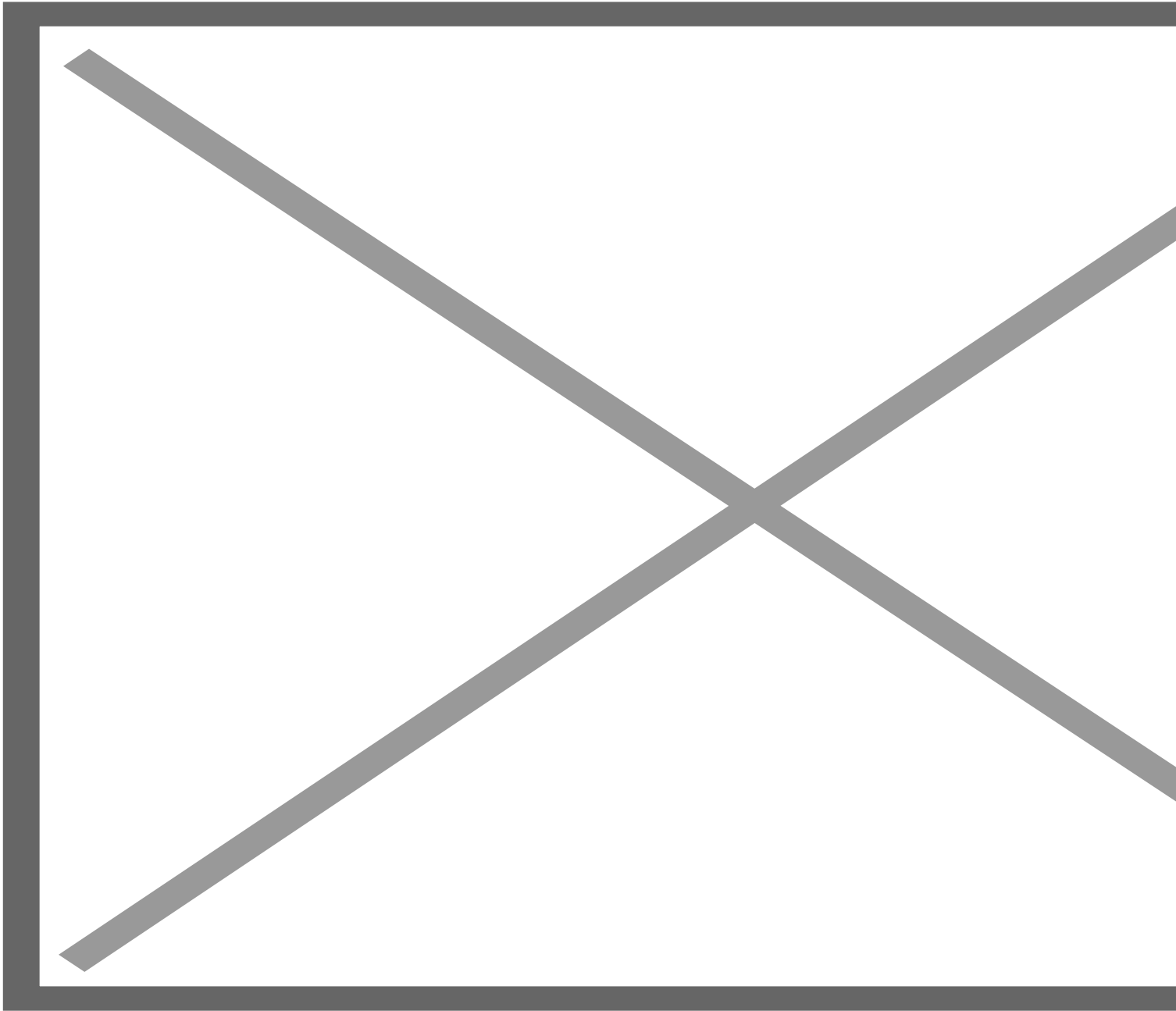


Songs that call me home to Puerto Rico

## **Bad Bunny's music and activism have reconnected me to roots I thought were severed beyond repair.**

by [Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi](#) in the [February 2026](#) issue

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Bad Bunny performs during the final concert of his summer residency in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in September 2025. (AP Photo / Alejandro Granadillo)

With a traditional *pava* hat atop his black curls, Bad Bunny crooned “La Mudanza” (“The Move”), the final song in a four-hour concert livestreamed worldwide from the Coliseum (known as *El Choli*) in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It was the eighth anniversary of Hurricane Maria making landfall on the island. As I sat on my living room couch, eyes glued to the TV screen for the entire performance—even forgoing bathroom breaks—I had what I can only describe as a spiritual experience.

Religion is what connects humans to that which exists beyond our knowing and being, and that night on my couch was the closest I’ve come to being in church outside of an actual Sunday service. The words traveled from Bad Bunny’s mouth to my ears:

*De Borinquen, PR, archipiélago perfecto . . .  
Aquí mataron gente por sacar la bandera  
Por eso es que ahora yo la llevo donde quiera.*

From Borinquen, PR, the perfect archipelago . . .  
Here, people were killed for raising the flag.  
That’s why I carry it everywhere.

I cried tears of awe and pride as the crowd roared.

The concert was a kaleidoscopic interplay between traditional and modern rhythms, dances, clothing, landscapes, and narratives, all of which contained both explicit and implicit nods to Puerto Rican histories of struggle, resistance, survival, and relentless *presencia* (presence).

Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio—aka Bad Bunny, “the most popular American on earth,” [according to Newsweek](#)—was singing to me, a second-generation diasporan-born Puerto Rican whose grasp of Spanish is mediocre at best. I grew up in the US Southwest, where the Spanish language and Latine culture take on an entirely different dialect and cadence. I always felt distanced from my Puerto Rican heritage. Many diasporans living on the mainland grew up in hubs like New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, or Orlando and were immersed in the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the island, but my dad moved our family from New York City to rural southern Colorado while I was still in utero. His parents had long since died, and they would have been my only real tie to Borinquen (the Indigenous Taíno name for the island). My dad shared with us kids what he could—mostly in the form of fried plantains and a few slang phrases—but he’d never set foot on the island.

Over the past few years, Bad Bunny’s music and activism have reconnected me to roots I thought were severed beyond repair. His lyrics call me home—to my ancestors who lived, labored, and died on the world’s oldest colony, to all Boricuas born and raised on the island, to diasporan Nuyoricans, Philadelphians, Chicagoans, Floridians, and others, and to all peoples who have known violence, oppression, erasure, and colonization. This is also a call to care, to recognize the connection between my fate and the fate of all Puerto Ricans and Latine peoples (and most of us also possess Indigenous, African, and other ancestries). Their joys and struggles are my joys and struggles; they are ours to collectively know and share.

So, as you can imagine, when the ad announcing Bad Bunny as headliner of the Super Bowl halftime show came across my social media feed, I was elated. A collective “Wepa!” (a Puerto Rican exclamation akin to “Hooray!”) immediately flooded my feeds, which tells you how my algorithms are aligned.

The next day, however, I saw a series of critiques from conservative media calling for an “American” headliner.

Bad Bunny is American. Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the United States. But he has been clear about his pro-independence politics and has even [fueled new energy for the independence movement](#).

Conservatives—especially MAGA supporters—also opined that Bad Bunny did not schedule dates for his most recent tour on the US mainland, citing [fear of ICE raids at his concerts](#). He opted instead to kick off his world tour with a 31-show residency in Puerto Rico, bringing a \$700 million economic boost to the island.

Perhaps most distressing to the MAGA audience is that Bad Bunny will be the first halftime show artist in Super Bowl history to perform entirely in Spanish. Even as the NFL tries to cater to an increasingly diverse viewership—Latines (both English- and Spanish-speaking) constitute the [fastest growing fan base in the NFL](#)—the majority of football viewers remains [White](#).

Football is one of America's [civic religions](#), replacing Sunday worship services with pledges of money, time, and devotion to the country's most-watched sport. If this is the case, then the Super Bowl is football's high holy day. Another religion has subsumed the religion of football in this present moment, however. White Christian nationalism has taken this US-born-and-bred sport and many of its followers under its wing and commanded that football remain distinctly "Christian"—as in, White.

In addition to the racist and xenophobic impulses of this form of nationalism, MAGA politicians like Marjorie Taylor Greene have claimed that Bad Bunny's halftime show will be a ["demonic sexual performance."](#) Never mind that Benito [was raised Catholic](#), sang in the church choir as a boy, and continues to invoke and acknowledge the presence of God in interviews and in his lyrics. This is the icing on the White Christian nationalist fellowship hour cake: the power to determine who is righteous enough to perform in one of America's most coveted pulpits.

While there were questions about Kendrick Lamar prior to the 2025 halftime show, Bad Bunny's selection to perform comes at a moment of kismet. The confluence of race (being Latine in a time of sanctioned racial profiling for the sake of immigration "safety"), non-mainlander status (a border identity laying bare the country's continuing role in colonialism), and language (enjoying global popularity for non-English singing) have brought out the final card in the nationalist playbook. Bad Bunny can only be framed as demonic because of these identities. This is why Turning Point USA is planning [an alternate halftime show](#) "celebrating faith, family, and freedom"—values they would like to convince Americans that Bad Bunny is working to destroy—to maintain the sanctity of the Super Bowl and nostalgic Americana along with it.

Latines the world over are not demonic, and nor are our languages, immigration statuses, nationalities, ethnicities, ancestries, sexualities, abilities, gender identities, religions, or spiritualities. We are sacred beings who worship, pray, repent, sing, dance, create, love, labor, fight, stumble, and rise again and again. We have endured the collapses and births of empires since before 1492, and we will continue well beyond the collapses and births that are yet to come. As the United States celebrates its 250th birthday throughout 2026, we should remember this cycle to which all empires must eventually succumb.

I am not immune to the heartstring tugs of civic religion. What I experienced in my living room watching Bad Bunny may not be much different from what White Christian nationalists feel when they hear "God Bless America" or watch the fireworks on the Fourth of July. I consider such moments to be genuine encounters. We interpret experiences as religious and spiritual through our political ideologies, economic practices, participation in sports and social clubs, and preferences in music, television, and games.

But the real test is whether or not those experiences connect us with God in a manner that calls us to live out the words and actions of Jesus. We may feel the same sense of awe and pride, or the same connections to home and roots, during these transcendent encounters, but what fruit is borne? If we reap exclusion and hate, not inclusion and love, then I don't want any part of that religion.

Bad Bunny is no deity. But his music is inspiring the world at this moment, bringing people together across languages, nationalities, and a whole host of other differences. His decision to perform on what is arguably the world’s biggest stage might be a form of resistance to hate, to empiric religion, and to a worldview that seeks to cast aside those who are considered other, less than, or unwelcome.

I know that not all Latines will be cheering for Bad Bunny during halftime at the Super Bowl, especially not those who are MAGA. But I will be sitting on my couch that Sunday, ready to cry “Wepa!”—and to experience a moment of solidarity, joy, and beauty as Benito sings “La Mudanza”:

*De aquí nadie me saca, de aquí yo no me muevo.  
Dile que esta es mi casa, donde nació mi abuelo.  
Yo soy de P . . . R.*

Nobody can get me out of here, I’m not moving.  
Tell him this is my house, where my grandfather was born.  
I’m from P . . . R.

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The *Century*’s community engagement editor Jon Mathieu chats with Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi about the message of love in Bad Bunny’s 2026 Super Bowl half-time performance.

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