

DANCING THE REVOLUTION

# DANCING THE REVOLUTION

Apr 13 2026 – Sep 20 2026

Griffin Galleries of Contemporary Art  
Fourth Floor



Untitled (Ricky Renuncia), 2019

Supakid (b. 1985, Bayamón, Puerto Rico; lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico)

Digital Photograph

Courtesy of the artist

MCA

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## Overview and Framework

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Exploring the function of the sound system as a social institution and how music and dance serve as revolutionary practice for collective liberation

#### b) Lesson Block 2- Congregation

Examining music and ritual as a survival strategy and collective resistance.

#### c) INTERLUDE- From Under mi SlengTeng to Dembow

Tracing the evolution of important rhythms from Dancehall to Reggaeton.

#### d) Lesson Block 3- Slackness

Analyzing how overt sexuality challenges polite respectability and addresses gender roles and empowerment.

#### e ) Lesson Block 4- Protest

Investigating art and dance as direct forms of protest and action

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## OVERVIEW

Dancing the Revolution is inspired by how changes in speed or RPM (revolutions per minute) in Jamaican popular music reflect political and social shifts. The exhibition is a visual and sonic narrative that focuses on key moments and themes in the complex history of Dancehall and Reggaetón. Their vibrating rhythms embody defiant force, creative ingenuity, and decolonial joy. They exceed their grassroots origins in Jamaica, Panama, and Puerto Rico to become global forces that mobilize music and dance as revolutionary practice for collective liberation.

Each of these four lesson blocks focuses on ways to engage with the culture of liberation. Students will explore connections to their own communities and create projects based on their own personal experiences.

### Lesson Block 1- Community

In Lesson Block 1, we explore how people in the Caribbean came together through the sound system. The sound system, a mobile speaker stack, can create a party anywhere. It's more than just a party though. The sound system creates a critical space for community engagement and social empowerment. It is often described by Jamaicans as a civic institution.

### Lesson Block 2- Congregation

In Lesson Block 2, we examine music and ritual. Spirituality served as a form of community through Roots Reggae music and the artworks of Everaldo Brown, which enabled individuals from collective resistance against injustice and violence.

### INTERLUDE- From Under mi Sleng Teng to Dembow

A musical history lesson tracing the evolution of important rhythms from Dancehall to Reggaetón.

### Lesson Block 3- Slackness

Lesson Block 3 focuses on the concept of "slackness"- explicit expression of sexuality and debauchery common to popular music. Within Dancehall and Reggaetón, musicians and artists challenge polite respectability, while making space for all sexualities and identities.

### Lesson Block 4- Protest

In Lesson Block 4, we analyze the 2019 protests in Puerto Rico known as "Verano del '19". Dance and music become acts of resistance against oppressive governor Ricardo Roselló, who demonstrated violent disregard for the people he governed through misogynistic, homophobic, and callous remarks.

Finally, this curriculum utilizes an intentional, dual- register language approach. To fully explore the complexity of Dancehall and Reggaetón, which actively challenge polite respectability and embody self-determination and resistance, the curriculum integrates highly formal, academic terminology alongside the vernacular language of the Dancehall culture. The juxtaposition of sophisticated social-justice style language with terms like "Slackness" and "Perreo Combativo" is a strategic choice designed to reflect the cultural contradiction at the heart of the exhibition: the profound political and spiritual work embedded within practices often dismissed as mere entertainment.

## LEARNING GOALS AND STANDARDS

This curriculum was designed in alignment with Illinois State Board of Education standards in Arts, Social Sciences, and Social Emotional Learning. It provides a strong framework for interdisciplinary learning that draws extensively on themes of cultural expression, political agency, and identity formation.

As a whole the curriculum aims for students to:

1. Deconstruct Power Dynamics: Students should move beyond viewing Dancehall and Reggaetón merely as entertainment and instead recognize them as intellectual, political, and spiritual practices. The goal is to analyze how these art forms assert sovereignty and challenge colonial frameworks, polite respectability, and social stratification based on race, class, and gender.
2. Understand Cultural Institutions as Resistance: Students learn to recognize local, gathering spaces, like the sound system, not just as musical platforms but as powerful, alternative civic institutions that foster community and resistance.
3. Engage in Creative Response: The curriculum integrates close looking and making activities, aiming for students to apply their understandings to produce original, self-reflective projects that build upon their personal experiences.

## SOCIAL SCIENCE STANDARDS

### History

SS.9-12.H.7 Identify and analyze the role of individuals, groups, and institutions in people's struggle for safety, freedom, equality, and justice.

This standard is met through examining the political role of individuals, groups (like Dancehall Queens), and institutions (like the sound system) in struggles for liberation.

SS.9-12.H.3 Evaluate the methods used to promote change and the effects and outcomes of these methods on diverse groups of people.

This standard is met by analyzing non-traditional methods of protest (dance, music, slackness) and their social outcomes.

### Sociology

SS.Soc.2.9-12. Analyze the impact of social structure, including culture, institutions, and societies.

The curriculum investigates the foundational role of the sound system as an institution within Jamaican and Caribbean communities, serving as a political and social gathering space. It also examines the intersection of race, class, and gender as constructed within these societies.

SS.Soc.5.9-12. Explain the social construction of self and groups and their impact on the life chances of individuals.

Lessons address how Dancehall challenges Eurocentric ideals of beauty, status, and polite respectability. Lesson Block 3 specifically focuses on how artists reclaim Reggaetón as a space for empowerment against gender stereotypes, demonstrating how identity is socially constructed through cultural practice.

## DANCING THE REVOLUTION

### Anthropology

SS.Anth.1.9-12. Analyze the elements of culture and explain the factors that shape these elements differently around the world.

The entire curriculum is a deep dive into Caribbean cultural practices (music, dance, fashion, visual art). Students examine traditional symbols like Kente Cloth and contemporary expressions like perreo, analyzing how these elements function as resistance.

### Geography (G)

SS.G.6.9-12. Analyze how historical events and the diffusion of ideas, technologies, and cultural practices have influenced migration patterns and the distribution of human population.

The exhibition tracks the global spread of these music genres, noting their origins in Jamaica, Panama, and Puerto Rico, and their transformation into global forces. Lesson Block 1 looks at the value of sound systems to Jamaica's economy and culture, while examining the art of Cosmo Whyte, who visualizes his personal migration and struggles with assimilation as an immigrant.

### Civics (CV) / Inquiry Skills (IS)

SS.CV.8.9-12. Analyze how individuals use and challenge laws to address a variety of public issues.

Lesson Block 4, focusing on the 2019 protests, directly addresses challenging the actions of the oppressive governor Ricardo Rosselló and features Perreo Combativo (combative twerking) as a political strategy used to interrupt colonial frameworks and protest corruption.

## ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS (VISUAL, ARTS, DANCE, MUSIC)

### Visual Arts

VA:Cr.2.3.I. Collaboratively develop a proposal for an installation, artwork, or space design that transforms the perception and experience of a particular place.

The making activities encourage spatial and design problem-solving related to community themes.

VA:Cn11.1.I. Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

All Looking sections analyze artworks in the context of specific Caribbean cultural, spiritual, and political histories.

### Dance

DA:Cn11.1.I. Analyze and discuss dances from selected genres or styles and/ or historical periods. Formulate reasons for the similarities and differences between them in relation to the ideas and perspectives of the peoples from which the dances originate.

Lessons discuss Dancehall and Reggaetón dance forms, linking them directly to cultural purposes such as expressing overt sexuality (slackness) and performing collective resistance (Perreo Combativo).

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) STANDARDS

SEL.2B.I.2 Analyze how various social and cultural groups are portrayed in the media.

This directly relates to analyzing media portrayals of Dancehall and Reggaetón, which often challenge or contradict dominant stereotypes regarding gender and class.

SEL.3C.I.4 Describe how various organizations contribute to the well-being of your community.

This links to the essential theme: recognizing the music's role as a civic institution and communal space critical to community well-being.

### Self-Awareness & Self-Management

SEL Goal 1: Recognize and apply knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses to successfully meet goals.

Lesson Block 3 involves deep self-reflection, asking students when they feel “most like myself” and analyzing times they felt excluded. The making activity challenges students to create a portrait that celebrates their personalities and identities.

### Social Awareness & Relationship Skills

SEL Goal 2: Demonstrate awareness of diverse social and cultural norms and adjust behavior to appropriate settings.

The core content requires students to understand cultural norms that contrast with Western ideals. Students discuss how different communities gather and the political significance of music in different contexts.

## LESSON BLOCK STRUCTURE

Each Lesson Block is structured into four sections:

### Listening

Individual reflection and close listening to music.

Establishes a sonic environment and grounds the theme in personal experience. This phase serves as a musical and emotional warm-up, allowing students to transition into the day's subject matter.

### Looking

Group discussion and visual analysis of an artwork/image.

Introduces historical and political context, connecting the art to core exhibition themes. This is the main academic phase, focusing on critical literacy and visual culture. The pacing is structured to move from subjective initial responses to deep contextual analysis.

### Additional Reading

Close reading and discussion of an academic text.

This phase involves the close reading and discussion of an academic text excerpt or article that supports the Block's central themes. This section is intended to foster a deeper understanding of the block's topics by linking the artwork to established scholarly ideas. This reading may be assigned flexibly as preparatory work or incorporated as a brief, supplementary analysis session after the Looking section.

### Making

Hands-on, creative project related to the theme.

Allows students to shift the learning from analysis to creative application, synthesizing concepts into an artmaking activity, and building upon their personal experiences.

### Gathering

Brief communal exercise and additional reflection.

This brief communal exercise rounds out the block, using simple performances to reinforce the collective themes of the curriculum.

# LESSON BLOCK 1

## COMMUNITY



Cosmo Whyte (b. 1982, St. Andrew, Jamaica; lives in Los Angeles, CA)

*Sole Imperial*, 2019

Plywood, 12 speakers, 3 horns, 15 tweeters

Courtesy of the artist and Anat Ebgi Gallery



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## LESSON BLOCK 1- COMMUNITY

The sound system is the rhythmic engine at the heart of Caribbean popular culture, functioning as an alternative civic institution where communities congregate. These mobile discos became a prominent street theater, allowing ordinary people to transcend their humdrum lives and become somebody, if only for a time.

Michael Richards' sculpture, *Swing Lo'* (1996), an iron chariot outfitted like a lowrider car, blasts music and references the spiritual song "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot". Richards links this communal music space to themes of redemption and spiritual ascension.

Cosmo Whyte's sound sculpture, *Sole Imperial* (2019) cites the makeshift mobile speaker systems assembled for Jamaican street parties. It gestures toward the grassroots economics of the sound system, and plays an interview with the artist's uncle, detailing the sound system's role as the center of community life.

These works, alongside Edra Soto's *Bad Bunny Chairs*, assert that infrastructure and gathering, whether monumental or vernacular, are essential tools for reclaiming power and are aspects of a spiritual and revolutionary struggle against colonial oppression

## GLOSSARY

| TERM                          | DEFINITION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alternative Civic Institution | A local, grassroots gathering space, like the sound system, that operates outside of formal government structures, providing essential community functions, fostering congregation, and offering survival strategies for marginalized people.                                                                                                                           |
| Colonial Society              | A society characterized by a rigid class hierarchy inherited from the historical period of colonization. Dancehall culture creates its own value system outside of this structure.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Dancehall                     | Dancehall music is one of the most powerful forms of popular culture in Jamaica. The name comes from the physical space where sound system operators played popular Jamaican music. Initially, it was a sparser version of Reggae than the roots style but developed into a style characterized by prevalent digital instrumentalization and extensive Jamaican Patois. |
| Deejay                        | The key role in a sound system who improvises or toasts their lyrical prose over the instrumental track provided by the Selector.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Diaspora                      | The dispersion of a people from their original homeland. In this context, it refers to communities of people, such as those of Jamaican or Puerto Rican descent, living outside of their original islands.                                                                                                                                                              |
| Marginalized Communities      | Groups of people, often from inner cities or poorer communities, who are systematically excluded from power, visibility, and high social status in society. The sound system provided an accessible space for this group to assert power.                                                                                                                               |
| Polite Respectability         | Societal standards, often associated with middle- and upper-class Eurocentric ideals, that dictate proper public behavior, dress, and standards of beauty and status. Dancehall challenges this concept.                                                                                                                                                                |
| Riddim                        | A term borrowed from Jamaican patois used to describe the instrumental rhythm section or accompaniment track of a Dancehall or Reggae song.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Selector                      | The key role in a sound system who plays the instrumental track or riddim.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Smadification / Smadditizin'  | A Jamaican term meaning the process of "becoming somebody." This occurs within the performative environment of dancehall, allowing people to leave behind their ordinary, humdrum lives to gain status and respect by defining their own value system through fashion, dance, and attitude.                                                                             |
| Sound System                  | The sound system is a public and mobile disco or dance party where lower-class and marginalized communities gather and listen to music and dance. The sound system is the driving force behind most forms of Caribbean popular music, particularly in Jamaica where it became widespread in the 1950s as a form to celebrate Black life.                                |

## LISTENING

Open the lesson with some music. This lesson is about listening in community. Practice listening together.

**ASK** some questions to help students recall their relationship with music before sharing the track.

- How do you listen to music?
- Where do you listen to music?
- When do you listen to music with other people?
- How does it feel?

**SHARE** the following track.

*Bam Bam*  
by Sister Nancy  
Techniques Records, 1982

*Bam Bam*  
by Chaka Demus & Pliers  
Mango, 1992

**ASK** some questions to help students talk about what they are hearing.

- Does this sound familiar to anyone?
- Even if you don't recognize the song does the rhythm or texture remind you something you do know?
- When do you think a song like this might play?

**BUILD** some context about the track and invite questions or new reflections.

"Bam Bam" by Sister Nancy and "Bam Bam" by Chaka Demus & Pliers are foundational tracks in the history and transnational spread of Dancehall music. Sister Nancy's "Bam Bam" is associated with one of the most highly influential "riddims" (instrumental rhythm tracks) that helped shape Reggaetón. The rhythmic framework of Reggaetón is defined by the "dembow" rhythm, which evolved from prevailing Dancehall rhythms of the late 1980s and early 1990s, including key riddims like the "Bam Bam" and "Drum Song." The version with Chaka Demus and Pliers samples Sister Nancy's version.

- How are these songs different from each other? What is sampling?

## LOOKING- *SWING LO*

Begin looking at artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Michael Richards (b. 1963, New York, NY; d. 2001, New York)  
*Swing Lo*, 1996  
Steel, neon, wood, speakers with musical soundtrack, audio tape  
The Michael Richards Estate  
Photo by Oriol Tarridas Photography

**ASK** some questions to help students look closely and begin a visual analysis of the artwork.

- Has anyone seen anything that looks like this before?
- Does it look old or new?
- Where would you expect to see it?
- What kind of sound would you expect it to make?

**LISTEN** to the track again. Play it low so that students can continue conversation while it plays in the background. Inform students that this track plays from this sculpture.

**ASK** some questions to invite students to compare the appearance of the sculpture (and the associations the students made) with the track (and associations with it).

- What sounds do they produce?
- Do the sounds feel surprising or expected?
- How would it feel to stand in front of this object?

**BUILD** your conversation further by introducing some context on this artwork:

Michael Richards's sculpture, *Swing Lo'*, is a rusted, one-wheeled chariot that is inspired by two major cultural references: sound system culture and the history of African American resilience.

The sound system is a public and mobile disco or dance party where communities in Jamaica gather and listen to music and dance. The sound system is the driving force behind most forms of Caribbean popular music, particularly in Jamaica where it became widespread in the 1950s as a form to celebrate Black life. Sound system gave marginalized communities in the Caribbean access to not only music but also an opportunity to congregate and celebrate together.

This sculpture is a chariot. A chariot is a horse-drawn vehicle used in ancient times in battles and ceremonies.

Richard's "chariot" is outfitted like a lowrider car—a highly customized vehicle meant to draw attention and equipped with features like a neon underglow. *Swing Lo* also has a blue neon underglow. This design also refers to the decked-out sound system cars that function as mobile discos or dance parties for marginalized communities in Jamaica.

The sculpture the piece plays 1990s-era Jamaican dancehall and Panamanian reggae en español music. You can listen to the full *Swing Lo'* playlist—which comes from a mix CD Michael Richards gave to artist William Cordova in Miami in 1999. It includes the following songs:

- "Tour" by Capleton
- "Action" by DJ D. Love, Terror Fabulous, and Nadine Sutherland
- "Ghetto Red Hot" by Super Cat
- "Twice My Age" by Shabba Ranks and Krystal
- "Pose Off" by Red Fox and Screechie Dan
- "Hot This Year" by Dirtsman
- "Rich Girl" by Louchie Lou
- "Who Say Me Dun" by Cutty Ranks
- "Them A Bleach" by Nardo Ranks
- "Bam Bam" by Chaka Demus & Pliers
- "Santa Barbara" by Sly & Robbie, remixed with "No Diggity" by Blackstreet
- "Freaks" by Doug E. Fresh
- "Pu Tun Tun" by El General
- "Bam Bam" by Sister Nancy

## LOOKING- *SOLE IMPERIAL*

Begin looking at the next artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Cosmo Whyte (b. 1982, St. Andrew, Jamaica; lives in Los Angeles, CA)

*Sole Imperial*, 2019

Plywood, 12 speakers, 3 horns, 15 tweeters

Courtesy of the artist and Anat Ebgi Gallery

**ASK** some questions to help students look closely and begin a visual analysis of the artwork.

- Do you see any similarities between this sculpture and *Swing Lo*?
- How is it different?
- Where would you see an object like this? What kind of music or audio do you think this stereo system plays?

**BUILD** your conversation further by introducing some context on this artwork:

*Sole Imperial* resembles a stack of stereo speakers topped by a cresting wave. The structure is inspired by Jamaican sound systems assembled of plywood and audio equipment and operated by DJs. These sound systems were tall and heavy yet easily portable in the back of pickup trucks to provide music for spontaneous street dance parties.

The work's audio features a recorded interview between the artist and his uncle, Patrick Johnson, who also collaborated on the sculpture. The uncle describes how the sound system in their neighborhood, which was also named "Soul Imperial," served as the central point of social and economic community life.

Sound systems boosted Jamaica's economy and propelled emerging music styles like ska and Reggae to worldwide popularity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Gaugh, "The Migrants' Journey: Artist Cosmo Whyte Forges a New Identity in a New Land," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, September 20, 2020, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/2020/09/20/the-migrants-journey-artist-cosmo-whyte-forges-a-new-identity-in-a-new-land/>.

**REFLECT** by synthesizing what they've learned about the significance of the sound system.

- What is a sound system? What is dancehall? How are they different, and why is it so important?

Dancehall music is one of the most powerful forms of popular culture in Jamaica. The name comes from the physical space where sound system operators played popular Jamaican music. Initially, it was a sparser version of Reggae than the roots style but developed into a style characterized by prevalent digital instrumentalization and extensive Jamaican Patois.

The sound system is a public and mobile disco or dance party where lower-class and marginalized communities gather and listen to music and dance. The sound system is the driving force behind most forms of Caribbean popular music, particularly in Jamaica where it became widespread in the 1950s as a form to celebrate Black life.

"Dancehall's roots began and were informed by the lived experience of Kingston's lower and working class people. The music that came out of it was melodic narratives on how they navigated the space, but dancehall is as much about music as it is about the fashion, dance and art that surrounded it. It wasn't just a genre, it was a way of life.

Prior to dancehall's proliferation, ska, rocksteady, mento, American R&B and roots Reggae were the styles of music that were most prominent across Jamaica, but in the late '70s, a shift began with both the sound and lyrical content that then-emerging artists were crafting. Soundsystems and dance halls –physical areas designated for partying – were already fixtures in various communities in and around Kingston. Surrounded by food, alcohol and budding dancehall aficionados, a deejay would toast, or rather, speak over, a vinyl record, and sound clashes – competition between opposing local Soundsystems – started to increase in popularity. As such, dancehall continued to grow and became a favorite amongst the masses, as everyday experiences and shared longing for a different life were transcribed into infectious and rhythmic musical arrangements." <sup>2</sup>

Sharine Taylor in "The Essential Guide to Dancehall."

**INTRODUCE** a new term, "smadification."

The sound system and the Dancehall were vital because they created an accessible space for the marginalized working-class to assert power and visibility. Within this dynamic and performative environment, participants often experience a kind of transformation, what Jamaicans call "smadification" or "smadditizin." Smadification is essentially the process of becoming somebody; people leave their ordinary life behind and gain status and respect, using fashion, dance, and attitude to define their own value system, outside of the rigid class hierarchy of colonial society. This transformation is an inheritance from the long history of Africans who used music, ritual, and dance as resistance against dehumanization and to establish a sense of self-worth.

**DISCUSS** how music can function in public and community spaces.

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<sup>2</sup> Sharine Taylor, "The Essential Guide to Dancehall," *Red Bull Music Academy Daily*, July 10, 2019, <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2019/07/essential-guide-to-dancehall/>. *Red Bull Music Academy Daily*

## LESSON BLOCK 1- COMMUNITY

Dancehall is a physical space and a musical tradition essential to Jamaican identity, where marginalized people celebrate their lives and assert power and visibility. Gathering itself is a collective act of resistance and spiritual survival.

- Think about a time you have gathered with others around music in a public or communal space (like a block party, a concert, a crowded bus, a locker room, or even online). What role did the music play in shaping attitudes in that space or bringing people together?
- The sound system in Jamaican communities served as a space where many people, often marginalized, could define themselves and assert their power. Have you ever been in a communal space where the music, fashion, or atmosphere made you feel more visible, respected, or most like yourself?
- People sometimes refer to attending a dancehall event as “going to church.” Why might a loud dance party be described using spiritual or religious language?
- The spiritual song “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” sings of redemption and ascension. How does music function as a tool for hope or survival for your communities, even when facing issues like economic hardship or oppression?

## LOOKING- *BAD BUNNY CHAIR*

Begin looking at the artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Edra Soto (b. 1971 location, Puerto Rico; lives in Chicago Illinois)  
*BB Chair 1*, 2025  
Textile and plastic  
Courtesy of Engage Projects

**ASK** some questions to help students formulate an understanding of what they are seeing.

- What is familiar about the shape and material of these chairs? Where have you seen chairs like this before?
- How has the artist transformed this everyday object?
- If Michael Richards and Cosmo Whyte focused on monumental sound systems, how does Edra Soto's work, focused on seating, contribute to the idea of gathering and community?
- What feeling or tone do the colors, fabrics, and decorative elements (like the airbrushed names) convey?

**BUILD** some context for students about how these chairs figure into Puerto Rican culture.

These chairs are sculptural iterations of the ubiquitous Monoblock model, an injection molded plastic chair known for being common, cheap, and easily stackable.

By transforming this ordinary structure, Soto seeks to call attention to its cultural value. Soto calls objects like these chairs the "sustenance" of culture. Because so many people sit on the same chair, they establish a collective experience.

The chairs show the musician Bad Bunny, who featured this chair on one of his album covers, *DeBí Tirar Más FOTOS* (2025). They also include Puerto Rican terms of endearment (diminutives ending in "-ita").

Soto's chairs challenge colonial narratives that favor monumental architecture over vernacular residential architecture by affirming objects rooted in everyday dignity and the working class.

**ASK** some questions to encourage students to make deeper connections.

- If the sound system (seen in the works of Richards and Whyte) created community through powerful sound, how do these chairs create community?
- Bad Bunny uses his artistic platform to celebrate aspects of Puerto Rican life. How can popular culture validate objects and spaces that have been overlooked or deemed “low-class”?

## ADDITIONAL READING

Sharine Taylor, "The Essential Guide to Dancehall," Red Bull Music Academy Daily, July 10, 2019, <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2019/07/essential-guide-to-dancehall/>. Red Bull Music Academy Daily

"Picture this: Jamaica in the late '70s. A dance hall in the country's capital of Kingston is filled to the brim with working class people. They're dressed in their best, waiting for the selector and deejay to set the vibes. The selector spins an instrumental vinyl record, or what would later be referred to as a riddim in Jamaican parlance. The deejay, with a mic in hand, steps forward and begins to toast, delivering his best lyrical prose to a crowd that gets more excited with each, and every bar laced with bravado.

To its patrons, it was a freeing and entertaining means to cast aside the burdens that economic hardships imposed on their lives. Who knew it would later transform into something much grander than a genre of music – functioning as a window giving outsiders a peek into the Jamaica beyond the resorts and beaches.

Dancehall's roots began and were informed by the lived experience of Kingston's lower- and working-class people. The music that came out of it was melodic narratives on how they navigated the space, but dancehall is as much about music as it is about the fashion, dance and art that surrounded it. It wasn't just a genre, it was a way of life.

Prior to dancehall's proliferation, ska, rocksteady, mento, American R&B and roots Reggae were the styles of music that were most prominent across Jamaica, but in the late '70s, a shift began with both the sound and lyrical content that then-emerging artists were crafting. Soundsystems and dance halls – physical areas designated for partying – were already fixtures in various communities in and around Kingston. Surrounded by food, alcohol and budding dancehall aficionados, a deejay would toast, or rather, speak over, a vinyl record, and sound clashes – competition between opposing local Soundsystems – started to increase in popularity. As such, dancehall continued to grow and became a favorite amongst the masses, as everyday experiences and shared longing for a different life were transcribed into infectious and rhythmic musical arrangements."

### Discussion Questions

- The reading mentions two key roles: the Selector, who plays the instrumental track of riddim, and the Deejay, who improvises or toasts their lyrical prose over it. In your experience, who are the people- or what are the technologies- that serve these roles today? Is it a DJ on SoundCloud, a creator who drops a new sound on TikTok, or someone remixing tracks on YouTube? How has the process of sharing a beat and adding a voice changed, and how has it stayed the same?
- Do you rely on social media, specific podcasts, music lyrics, or online communities to find information or perspectives that are ignored by traditional news sources? How does music function as a tool for political or social awareness in your life or community?
- The sound system is described as a mobile disco- a stack of speakers easily portable in a truck- that allowed communities to congregate anywhere. If you could create a physical space that was the absolute center of social and economic community life for your friends or local group, what elements would you include?

## MAKING- GET LOUD, PAPER AMPLIFIERS

Taking inspiration from Michael Richards, Swing Lo' and Cosmo Whyte's, SOLE IMPERIAL, students will be creating their own amplifiers for gathering and "smadditizin".

### Materials:

cardboard  
disposable cup (plastic or Styrofoam) with base close to the width of the paper towel rolls  
paper towel roll or toilet paper roll  
craft knife  
pencil  
ruler  
masking tape or hot glue  
markers, paint or other decorative materials

### Directions:

Cut the bottom off the cup to create a sort of funnel using the craft knife. This will be the "speaker".

Secure the paper towel roll onto the narrow end of the cup roll using tape or hot glue.

Next begin creating the box that will hold the amplifier. First, cut four rectangles for the sides and two squares for the ends that are bigger than the cup and tube so they will fit inside the box.

Trace the opening of the cup onto one of the cardboard square end pieces. Cut out the circle to create an opening. Secure the cardboard onto the opening of the cup. Refer to the image for how it should look.

Cut a slit the size of the bottom of a cell phone into the top of the cardboard tube.

Tape or glue the cardboard pieces into a box around the amplifier leaving the top piece for last.

Before attaching the top of the box, cut a slit in the top piece of cardboard that is the same location and size as the slit in the paper towel roll.

Decorate the exterior of the amplifier to draw people to gather around the "sound system".

Here are some examples for how to decorate the amplifier:

Use colorful tape to add stripes or geometric lines.

Illustrate symbols of activities or passions you are involved in.

Paint the sound system with a scene of somewhere you listen to music.

Imagine what your favorite songs would look like, decorate the exterior with your visual interpretation of them.

Once the amplifiers are constructed and decorated, play music on a cell phone, insert the phone into the slot on the top of the amplifier and get loud.

## GATHERING- LET LOOSE, DRAWING TOGETHER

Alongside an opportunity to create, offer students a chance to come together. Combine an introduction to listening more to the music of Dancehall and Reggaeton and prepare a special material for the next unit.

### Directions:

Roll out a large portion of paper or give students large individual sheets of paper and drawing tools.

Direct students to draw freely, with the intention of moving intuitively with the music without judgement or expectations for what they will create.

Play a track from Michael Richards, *Swing Lo'* and invite students to draw while they listen.

After listening ask students to share out how they felt about their drawings and the process.

To prepare the paper for a project the next day and to emphasize the ephemeral nature of a live event, cut the paper into smaller sheets that can be utilized to create the following unit's project.

# LESSON BLOCK 2

## CONGREGATION



Denzil Forrester (b. 1956, Grenada; lives in Cornwall, United Kingdom)

Duppy Deh, 2018

Oil on linen

Courtesy of Margot and George Greig

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## LESSON BLOCK 2: CONGREGATION

Dancehall gatherings and spiritual assemblies both use congregation as a fundamental act of resistance and survival. Dancehall events and the intense London club scenes painted by Denzil Forrester, function as alternative civic institutions where marginalized working-class communities assert their power, overcome invisibility, and define their own value system. Everald Brown's art about spiritual assemblies similarly merges religion and philosophy to provide collective strength against injustice and colonial oppression. These sacred (Revival/Rastafari) and secular (Dancehall/Dub) assemblies are engaged in similar practices around ritual and intimate meaning-making, as practitioners of both garner a sense of belonging and control over their lives and destinies.

Everald Brown's artwork specifically shows how collective ritual becomes an act of sovereignty. Brown's sculpture, *Starry Harp (Instrument for Four People)* (1986), emphasizes collective responsibility through its unique form. Built by Brown for use during rituals at his church, *The Assembly of the Living*, the instrument requires four people to play it simultaneously. The *Starry Harp* physically embodies the idea that community interdependency is necessary for spiritual fulfillment and liberation. Likewise, his painting, *Nyabinghi Hour* (1969), documents the Rastafari Nyabinghi groundation, a spiritual ceremony involving singing, dancing, and drumming that often lasts for days. This gathering is rooted in Rastafari's ideology of Black empowerment.

## GLOSSARY

| TERM                                  | DEFINITION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| African Diaspora                      | The movement, forced or otherwise, of people of African descent from their traditional homelands to various parts of the world.                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| African-derived beliefs and practices | Traditional systems of faith and custom, traceable to Africa, that influence the Jamaican religious landscape, blending with Christianity and Rastafari to shape Jamaican society and the Dancehall subculture.                                                                                                                     |
| Burru Music                           | A secular form of African music that dates back to the slavery era in Jamaica. Its rhythms and three drums (bass, fundeh, repeater) were adopted by Rastafarians in the 1950s to create Nyabinghi music. Burru songs were often satirical, dealing with current events.                                                             |
| Dub                                   | A musical subgenre that evolved from Reggae and Dancehall.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Improvisation                         | The spontaneous act of generating ideas, such as new rhythms, melodies, or harmonic ideas in music, or spontaneously using movement and speech to create in drama.                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Kente Cloth                           | A traditional handwoven textile originating from the Ashanti people of Ghana, known for its vibrant colors, intricate patterns, and deep cultural significance. It is worn during important events and is studied in the curriculum as a traditional symbol of African heritage.                                                    |
| Nyabinghi Groundation                 | The name given to a Nyabinghi spiritual ceremony or communal ritual where Rastafari members gather for spiritual fulfillment, social justice, and collective resistance.                                                                                                                                                            |
| Polyrhythms                           | The simultaneous use of two or more distinct and contrasting rhythms. The polyrhythms of Burru music influenced reggae music. It is considered one of the seven foundations of African dance, along with repetition and polycentrism.                                                                                               |
| Revivalism                            | A Christian-based Afro-Jamaican religious movement that blends African spiritual traditions with Protestant Christianity, especially Baptist and Methodist influences. It emerged in Jamaica in the 19th century, particularly after the abolition of slavery in 1838.                                                              |
| Rastafarianism                        | A spiritual and cultural movement that began in Jamaica in the 1930s, rooted in Black empowerment, African identity, and resistance to colonial oppression. Though once marginalized, Rastafari has had a lasting cultural impact on Jamaica and beyond, blending religion, philosophy, and resistance into a powerful way of life. |
| Roots Reggae                          | A style of reggae music, prominent before dancehall, characterized by its conscious-minded nature. It is informed by Rastafari beliefs, speaking to black liberation, sovereignty, social justice, and spiritual fulfillment. It is                                                                                                 |

## LESSON BLOCK 2- CONGREGATION

|             |                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|             | sometimes associated with spiritual enlightenment and is contrasted with dancehall.                                                                       |
| Synesthesia | A neurological phenomenon where the stimulation of one sense (like hearing sound) leads to the automatic experience of another sense (like seeing color). |
| Xenophobia  | Racial hostility and intense fear or dislike of people from other countries or cultures.                                                                  |

## LISTENING - "BAM BAM"

Open the lesson with some music. This lesson is about the significance of congregating. Practice listening together.

**SHARE** the following tracks.

*Tour*  
by Capleton  
1994

**INVITE** students to do some free writing while listening.

In freewriting, you just let your thoughts flow freely onto paper. Students don't need to worry about grammar, punctuation, legibility, or even coherence.

- Write about a time you were in community. Where did you meet?
- What did you do together?
- How did it feel to spend time together?
- How often do you get together with people in that way?

**BUILD** some context about the track and invite questions or new reflections.

Capleton's "Tour" is a classic dancehall track about his actual experiences and observations while on the road, highlighting real-life events, political commentary, and spiritual messages of purification (fire), reflecting his Rastafari faith, and his lyrical style involves prophetic warnings and praise for Jah.

- Do you hear spiritual themes in this song? Where?
- This song is political, spiritual, and personal. Can you think of other music that encompasses multiple themes?

## LOOKING – STARRY HARP

Begin looking at the artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Everald Brown  
(b. 1917, Clarendon, Jamaica; d. 2003, New York, New York)  
*Starry Harp (Instrument for Four People)*, 1986  
Oil paint on wood.  
National Gallery of Jamaica.

**ASK** some questions to help students look closely and begin a visual analysis of this artwork.

- Have you ever played an instrument? What did it look like?
- Does this instrument remind you of anything you have ever seen before?
- How many people do you think can play this instrument at one time?
- How would they have to arrange (sit, stand, crouch, reach) together to play this instrument together? What kind of music would it make?
- What do you notice about how this instrument is decorated? What kinds of symbols do you see?

**BUILD** a conversation by providing some context on the artist of this artwork.

Everald Brown's artistic work engages with a wide range of Afro-Jamaican spiritual traditions, including Rastafari, Revival, Kumina, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Also known as "Brother Brown," he was a spiritual leader with visionary dreams.

Brown founded a small church, The Assembly of the Living, which was decorated with many of his paintings.

He believed that God chose him to translate spiritual messages embedded in nature through his art. For him, nature was a living spiritual being that communicated and listened to him.

He made drums and string instruments intended for use by his church community and family members during rituals.

## LESSON BLOCK 2- CONGREGATION

Brown's work focuses on people gathering together around the philosophies of Revivalism and Rastafarianism.

Revivalism is a Christian-based Afro-Jamaican religious movement that blends African spiritual traditions with Protestant Christianity, especially Baptist and Methodist influences. It emerged in Jamaica in the 19th century, particularly after the abolition of slavery in 1838.

Rastafarianism is a spiritual and cultural movement that began in Jamaica in the 1930s, rooted in Black empowerment, African identity, and resistance to colonial oppression. Though once marginalized, Rastafari has had a lasting cultural impact on Jamaica and beyond, blending religion, philosophy, and resistance into a powerful way of life.

**DISCUSS** together how *Starry Harp* relates to the theme of "congregation."

The Starry Harp is a complex instrument that includes a harp, a dove harp, a drum, and a rhumba box, and is designed to be played by four people simultaneously during rituals. It reflects Brown's belief in the importance of collective action and community.

- How do you think this requirement—that multiple people must cooperate to play the same instrument—would affect the composition and performance of music?

## LOOKING – NYABINGI HOUR

Begin looking at the artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Everaldo Brown  
(b. 1917, Clarendon, Jamaica; d. 2003, New York, New York)  
Nyabingi Hour, 1969  
Oil on hardboard  
National Gallery of Jamaica

**ASK** some questions to help students look closely and begin a visual analysis of the artwork.

- What kinds of things are the people in the painting doing? How are people interacting?
- Do you recognize any patterns or symbols?

**BUILD** understanding of the symbols and iconography in the artwork.

This painting depicts a Nyabinghi groundation, a Rastafari spiritual ceremony that often lasts several days and nights. It involves singing, dancing, drumming, and discussion of spiritual and social matters.

Nyabinghi also refers to the religious music associated with the ceremony. The call-and-response style of drumming uses three drums, as shown in the painting: bass, fundeh, and repeater.

In the 1950s, Rastafarians in West Kingston adopted the rhythms and three drums from Burru music, a secular form of African music dating to the slavery era in Jamaica, to create Nyabinghi. Burru songs were often satirical, dealing with current events. Its polyrhythms became influential to reggae music.

Kente cloth can be seen in this painting. Kente cloth is a traditional, handwoven textile originating from the Ashanti people of Ghana and used by the Ewe people of Ghana and Togo. It is known for its vibrant colors, intricate patterns, and deep cultural significance. Originally, Kente was worn by royalty and the elite, especially during sacred ceremonies, but today it is worn more widely during important events like weddings, graduations, and festivals. Kente is more than just fabric—every color, pattern, and design carries meaning. It conveys messages about history, ethics, and social values.

## LESSON BLOCK 2- CONGREGATION

The people wear Rastafari colors. The Rastafarian movement is a spiritual and cultural movement that originated in Jamaica in the 1930s, inspired by the teachings of Marcus Garvey and reverence for Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. The flag most associated with Rastafari is based on the colors of the Ethiopian flag, but it has additional symbolic layers in the Rastafarian context.

Red - Blood of martyrs and the struggles endured by Africans and their descendants

Gold (Yellow) - Wealth, prosperity, and the natural beauty of Africa

Green - The land of Ethiopia (considered the spiritual homeland), hope, and the abundance of vegetation

Black - The color of the African people and pride in African identity

**ASK** some questions to help students reflect on their personal connections to meaningful iconography.

- Do you wear colors, clothing, or symbols (like a national flag, a team logo, or even a brand) for special events to represent who you are, what you value, or where you come from?

The Nyabingi groundation is a serious ritual where people gather for spiritual fulfillment, social justice, and collective resistance. Think about the most important ways you gather with your friends, family, or community (it could be for a protest, a sports practice, a cultural tradition, or spiritual worship).

- How is the purpose of your gathering focused on something serious, like survival, identity, or justice, rather than just fun?

The Nyabingi groundation uses rhythm, drumming, dancing, and singing as key spiritual practices. Similarly, Jamaican popular culture, including dancehall, uses dance and bodily movement to defy authority and articulate identity. This use of the body is connected to African dance practices where movement can be considered sacred and a medium for worship.

- How do you use non-verbal elements like your stance, voice, rhythm, fashion, or movement to assert confidence, express your authentic self, or push back against expectations that society places on you based on your background or appearance?

**BUILD** some in some context on the themes on the relationship between Everal Brown's gatherings and dancehall culture. Read aloud these excerpts from *The Spirit of Dancehall: Embodying a New Nomos in Jamaica* by Kythie K. Brown

"Yet, through my exploration of bodies and theologies in the African diaspora, I have come to realize that these two kinds of bodies and rituals are perhaps engaged in not entirely dissimilar conversations. Both bodies are engaged in intimate meaning-making processes...

...As much as orthodox Reggae music can be characterized as a form of spiritual enlightenment, dancehall music comprises a spiritual element as well. The practitioners of dancehall do not simply perform lewd and lascivious acts, neither do they simply sing or deejay (rap) about immorality as a mere pastime, but they in fact garner a sense of

## LESSON BLOCK 2- CONGREGATION

belonging and control over their lives and destinies through the art form. Dancehall is influenced by Jamaica's religious landscape, which is suffused with Christianity, African-derived beliefs and practices, and Rastafari. These influences, which are integral to the Jamaican nomos, help to shape the dancehall subculture. Dancehall, however, refashions the given order and produces its own moral codes, ritual practices, and ways to achieve enlightenment through the modification of normative Christian and Rastafarian ideologies, as well as unique elements produced from life experiences in the ghettos of Jamaica. Dancehall is an intimate form of musical and embodied communication (perhaps too intimate for the Jamaican Christian majority) and through movement, "riddims," and lyrics, dancehall lovers and those living in the "garrison" (inner city) where dancehall gets its soul, fellowship together and feed their spirits."<sup>1</sup>

**ASK** about their relationship between different forms of congregations in Jamaican culture.

People gather around the Starry Harp and perform a groundation for a religious or spiritual reason. Communities gather around a sound system for a party. On the surface, these are very different occasions.

- How are they similar, beyond being opportunities for congregation?

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<sup>1</sup> Khytie K. Brown, "The Spirit of Dancehall: Embodying a New Nomos in Jamaica," *Transition*, no. 125 (2017): 17–31, <https://transitionmagazine.fas.harvard.edu/the-spirit-of-dancehall-embodying-a-new-nomos-in-jamaica/>.  
JSTORtransitionmagazine.fas.harvard.edu

## LOOKING- *DUPPY DEH*

Begin looking at the artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Denzil Forrester (b. 1956, Grenada; lives in Cornwall, United Kingdom)

*Duppy Deh*, 2018

Oil on linen

Courtesy of Margot and George Greig

**ASK** some questions to get students looking at the painting.

- What kinds of actions or movements do you see occurring in this painting?
- How does the artist use color, shapes, and angles to convey the feeling of the space?
- If this is a nightclub, how does it feel similar to or different from the gatherings depicted in Everaldo Brown's work, *Nyabingi Hour*?
- How do you imagine the music sounding in this moment? How does the painting capture the intense sound and rhythm?

**BUILD** some context on the artist of this artwork.

Denzil Forrester, a British artist of Grenadian descent, moved to London in 1967. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Jamaican diaspora in Britain faced racial hostility and xenophobia. Dub and reggae clubs served as essential lifelines and spaces of belonging and refuge for Caribbean immigrants, providing a way to "rekindle our community spirit."

Forrester frequented these unlicensed clubs, making quick sketches timed to the length of a single dub track (about three and a half minutes), capturing the energy of the dance, light, and sound.

When translating these sketches into large-scale paintings, Forrester often retained the energetic, embodied manner of his live drawing. He captures the sheer physicality of the sound system and visualizes the sound's effect on the bodies of the dancers, sometimes depicting couples in the dynamics of the dance.

This expressive visualization often uses synesthesia, translating the auditory spectrum of the session's sound into the full color spectrum of his palette.

## LESSON BLOCK 2- CONGREGATION

Everald Brown's ceremonies and the music of Roots Reggae enabled collective resistance against injustice. Forrester depicts the subsequent generation's equivalent gathering space: the club. For Brown, music served as a call to consciousness for social justice and spiritual fulfillment. For Forrester, Dub and Reggae provided a psychological and spiritual space for the diasporic community to assert power and identity away from colonial oppression and racial tension.

**ASK** some questions to help students make connections of their own.

- How are the concepts of resistance and liberation expressed differently when gathering in a religious ceremony versus gathering in a dance club?
- How might the ecstatic movement and loud volume of a dancehall club function as a temporary spiritual ascent for the participants, similar to traditional rituals?
- Forrester captured the energetic flow and rhythm of the club by drawing for the length of a single track. How does this method suggest that rhythm and sound are fundamental to shaping the communal and spiritual space?

## ADDITIONAL READING

Excerpts from *"The Spirit of Dancehall: Embodying a New Nomos in Jamaica"* by Kythie K. Brown. This reading provides a side-by-side look of people gathering around Reggae music and Dancehall music and how the gatherings are similar and different.

"As we approached the vicinity of the tent we heard the wailing voices, dominated by church women, singing old Jamaican spirituals. The heart beat riddim of the drums pulsed and reverberated, giving life to the chorus. "Alleluia!" "Praise God!" Indecipherable glossolalia punctuated the emphatic praise. The sounds were foreboding. Even at eleven years old, I held firmly to the disciplining of my body that my Catholic primary school so carefully cultivated. As people around me praised God and yelled obscenely in unknown tongues, giving their bodies over to the spirit in ecstatic dancing, marching, and rolling, it was imperative that I remained in control of my body. What if I too was suddenly overtaken by the spirit? It was particularly disconcerting as I was not convinced that there was a qualitative difference between being "inna di spirit [of God]" and possessed by other kinds of spirits.

In another ritual space, in the open air, lacking the shelter of a tent, heavy bass booms from sound boxes. The seismic tremors radiate from the center and can be felt early into the Kingston morning. The selector, in control of the microphone, speaks to his congregation. He exhorts men to, "Bring yuh queen and put down di machine!" and encourages women to "Bruck out gyal show yuh talent and skills!" Men and women gyrate and dance to the latest "riddims," but more astonishingly, they perform acrobatic feats under the spell of the dancehall rhythms, feats reminiscent of altered states of consciousness. The bodies in this ritual dancehall space in Kingston, Jamaica are often perceived as wholly disparate from the bodies worshipping under the tent. The latter body is in service of the sacred and the other is given over to profanity. Yet, through my exploration of bodies and theologies in the African diaspora, I have come to realize that these two kinds of bodies and rituals are perhaps engaged in not entirely dissimilar conversations. Both bodies are engaged in intimate meaning-making processes...

... Reggae's praises are jubilantly sung and Jamaica has no qualms about advertising its unique musical contribution to the world. Bob Marley is iconic and immortalized worldwide, thus putting Jamaica on the map eternally as a producer of these melodious tunes and "vibes." Yet, if reggae music is Jamaica's prized art form and expression, what then is dancehall music and what contribution does it make to Jamaican culture and to the global community?

Dancehall music is undoubtedly borne out of Reggae music; however, the content and character of the dancehall genre positions it as the ugly and wayward stepchild of its progenitor. This is because it assaults the delicate sensibilities of "decent" Jamaicans and forces them to address issues and topics considered uncouth. Dancehall, as characterized by the parents and grandparents of many Jamaican youth, is "bugu-yahgah" music and is essentially considered "noise," "nastiness," and "slackness." Slackness is the Jamaicanism used to describe the morally questionable, lewd, and the illicitly sexual.

As much as orthodox Reggae music can be characterized as a form of spiritual enlightenment, dancehall music comprises a spiritual element as well. The practitioners of dancehall do not simply perform lewd and lascivious acts, neither do they simply sing or deejay (rap) about immorality as a mere pastime, but they in fact garner a sense of belonging and control over their lives and destinies through the art form. Dancehall is influenced by Jamaica's religious landscape, which is suffused with Christianity, African-

## LESSON BLOCK 2- CONGREGATION

derived beliefs and practices, and Rastafari. These influences, which are integral to the Jamaican nomos, help to shape the dancehall subculture. Dancehall, however, refashions the given order and produces its own moral codes, ritual practices, and ways to achieve enlightenment through the modification of normative Christian and Rastafarian ideologies, as well as unique elements produced from life experiences in the ghettos of Jamaica. Dancehall is an intimate form of musical and embodied communication (perhaps too intimate for the Jamaican Christian majority) and through movement, “riddims,” and lyrics, dancehall lovers and those living in the “garrison” (inner city) where dancehall gets its soul, fellowship together and feed their spirits.”<sup>2</sup>

### Discussion Questions

- How does gathering with music in your own life—whether at an event, online, or in a specific physical space—allow you to express or define your identity, potentially making you feel more visible, respected, or most like yourself?
- When a large group gathers for a social event, how does the music, dance, and collective rhythm transform that crowd into a cohesive or powerful entity? What unique feelings of energy or shared purpose does the rhythm provide?
- The reading suggests that sacred (Revivalism/Rastafari) and secular (Dancehall) assemblies are engaged in “not entirely dissimilar conversations” and both allow practitioners to “garner a sense of belonging and control over their lives and destinies.” What connections do we see in the article between Revivalism and Rastafarianism and Dancehall culture? Discuss ways these very different types of gatherings function similarly as collective survival strategies against social hardship or injustice.
- Why might institutions or critics try to dismiss Dancehall as mere “fun entertainment” or “bugu-yahgah” music while treating religious or political congregations as serious and legitimate?

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<sup>2</sup> Khytie K. Brown, “The Spirit of Dancehall: Embodying a New Nomos in Jamaica,” *Transition*, no. 125 (2017): 17–31, <https://transitionmagazine.fas.harvard.edu/the-spirit-of-dancehall-embodying-a-new-nomos-in-jamaica/>.  
JSTOR[transitionmagazine.fas.harvard.edu](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4771111)

## MAKING – MULTIINSTRUMENTALIST, INSTRUMENT SCULPTURE

Invite students to apply the ideas of gathering as a community through a sculptural project.

### Materials:

Decorated paper from Lesson Block 1 Gathering Activity  
Found Objects (Cereal Boxes, Toilet Paper Rolls, Cardboard, Rice, Beads, Etc.)  
Straws  
Rubber Bands, Fasteners and Masking Tape  
Colorful Paper  
Drawing Materials  
Scissors

### Directions:

Invite students to think of a group of people in their lives. This could be a team they are part of, their family, their friends, a fan base... Ask them to consider what matters to this group, what kinds of needs they have, what symbols they are represented by?

Next, imagine an instrument that is meant to be played as a group. That group of people in your life: Who are they? What are their needs? What matters to them? Invent an instrument that could be played by them. What would it sound like? When will you play it? How?

After brainstorming, prompt students to create a quick sketch of an instrument that could be played by 2-5 members of this group. How would the instrument look? What would it be shaped like? How would it be played?

Invite students to consider some locations that the instrument components could be. How many instrument components are there? Is there a keyboard on the back? Are there strings on the top? How would you hold this instrument?

Once students have sketched their instruments, invite them to construct a sculptural sketch of the instrument. Start by creating the shape of the instrument out of cardboard or recycled materials. Then add the instrumental components by crafting "strings" with rubber bands, or flutes with straws.

Ask students to adorn and decorate their sculptures with the decorative paper made in Lesson Block 1 and symbols or illustrations that relate to the group their instrument is for.

For an extra challenge if students wish to they can attempt to make their instruments playable.

To create a playable instrument, consider the different kinds of sounds instruments make and how they could recreate them. Here are a few starting points but encourage exploration of the materials.

Stringed instruments: For plucked and twangy instruments consider stretching a rubber band over a flat surface attached using a fastener like a push pin, round head fasteners or staples.

Percussive instruments: For drummed, shaken, or rattled instruments consider a hollow form that can be hit like a box that is reinforced with tape or a shape that has smaller rattles like a cup filled with dry beans or rice sealed with tape.

## GATHERING – BRING THE BEAT IN, RHYTHM CLAPPING

Each lesson in this series will feature a brief community exercise to anchor the curriculum in dance in reference to the exhibition. This activity is centered in finding rhythm together.

Activate your classroom as a band by finding a common rhythm.

If students made their sculptural sketches playable, invite them to form groups around their instruments. Students can either play their own instruments, invite each other to join in playing on their group instruments, or play along through clapping and stomping.

The facilitator will begin by turning on an online metronome around 60 bpm. Have students begin by clapping along to the rhythm. On the down beat.

After students feel comfortable clapping along to the down beats introduce two new rhythms: The Tresillo and The Dembow beat.

Have them clap along to this beat first: The Tresillo pattern. The tresillo pattern is the context of the rhythm that defines Reggaetón, known as the "dembow" rhythm.

The tresillo pattern functions in music like a three-legged pulse within a two-step frame. Imagine you are walking (the "two-step frame," or the space of two regular beats). Instead of taking two equal steps, you quickly fit three smaller, perfectly equal pulses (the "three equal notes") into that same span of time. This overlay of three against two creates a characteristic syncopated, driving feeling in Reggaetón.

Then challenge students to find the Tresillo rhythm and clap along to it in the song "NUEVAYoL" by Bad Bunny.

After introducing the Tresillo rhythm, encourage students to find their own rhythm. Either put back on the listening song from the beginning of class, NUEVAYoL by Bad Bunny, or a Reggaeton song the students are excited about.

The facilitator will then begin to play a rhythm on their instrument. Establish a signal prior to playing that will mean "start" playing and "stop" playing. Other signals like a "solo" signal where that student plays solo and an "all together" signal could also be used to highlight individual students playing.

After they begin playing, they will instruct the nearest student to begin playing their instrument or clapping or stomping along, adding in a new rhythm or sound.

The facilitator will invite more students to play until everyone is playing together. Play all together for as long as seems right.

After everyone has played together motion to the first student again to stop playing. Slowly begin to stop more and more students until there is no one playing.

Reflect on what it was like to make music together. Ask students to reflect on what it feels like to create something as a community. What parts were challenging? What parts were rewarding?

# INTERLUDE

FROM UNDER MI SLENG TENG TO DEMBOW



MUSEUM OF  
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## INTERLUDE – FROM UNDER MI SLENG TENG TO DEMBOW

Reggaetón is a musical genre defined by the presence of the “dembow” rhythm and the mixing of other styles, including dancehall, hip hop, pop, and electronic dance music. The beat itself employs the tressillo pattern (three equal notes within the same time span ordinarily occupied by two notes), a rhythm common to Latin American music.

It’s commonly agreed that the Dembow beat was first developed by Jamaican and Afro-Panamanian producers in the early 1990s. The rhythm derived from the prevailing rhythmic pattern of dancehall in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, there is much controversy, including a lawsuit, on the precise originators of the Dembow rhythm. According to interviews with singers in Panamá, the rhythm that later became known as Dembow in reggaetón was created by Jamaican producer Dennis the Menace in New York for Nando Boom’s song “Pensión” (1990). This rhythm, which includes percussion elements from Panamanian military parades during national holidays, is a reworking of the rhythm sampled by Bobby Digital to create the song “Dem Bow” (1990) by Shabba Ranks. In turn, this sample used by Bobby Digital for Shabba Ranks is taken from the instrumental track “Fish Market” (1989) by Steely and Cleve.

## LISTENING – *UNDER MI SLENG TENG*

Under Mi Sleng Teng  
by Wayne Smith, Noel Davey, and Lloyd “King Jammy” James  
Jammy’s/Greensleeves, 1985

The Sleng Teng riddim was introduced in 1985 by producer Lloyd “King Jammy” James and keyboardist Noel Davy alongside vocals by Wayne Smith. (The term “riddim” is borrowed from Jamaican patois to describe the instrumental rhythm section in dancehall and reggae music.) The foundational riddim was created using the “rock” preset on a Casio MT-40 keyboard. This preset was composed by a Japanese engineer, Hiroko Okuda, who was allegedly inspired by the David Bowie song “Hand on to Yourself,” released in 1972.

The debut of Sleng Teng was a watershed moment because it signified the shift from heavy dependence on analog forms of music creation to digital production. This digitization allowed for the mobility and versatility of the music, making it possible for more artists to record on one riddim. King Jammy is celebrated as a pioneer for ushering in this digital transformation.

The technological platform established by Sleng Teng set the stage for later digital productions and created the environment where Dembow could emerge

## LISTENING – *FISH MARKET*

Fish Market  
By Steely & Clevie  
VP Records, 1990

The Dembow riddim itself is derived from the prevailing rhythmic pattern of dancehall reggae that developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The specific drumbeat is credited to an instrumental track: “Fish Market” (1989) by Steely and Clevie

Steely and Clevie first played together at Lee “Scratch” Perry’s Black Ark Studios during the late 1970s. In 1986, the duo was the house band at King Jammy’s Studio, which became the center point of late-1980s reggae, by which time Steely & Clevie were established production leaders with an immense catalog of 12-inch and dub singles. The duo formed the Steely & Clevie label in 1987, a year in which reggae riddims and dub-influenced hip-hop production by Ced Gee and KRS-One in the Bronx became prominent.

## LISTENING – *PENSIÓN*

Pensión  
By Nando Boom  
Dennis the Menace, 1990

According to interviews with singers in Panamá, the rhythm that later became known as Dembow in reggaetón was created by Jamaican producer Dennis the Menace in New York for Nando Boom’s song “Pensión” (1990). This rhythm, which includes percussion elements Panamanian military parades played during national holidays, is a reworking of the rhythm from “Fish Market.”

## LISTENING – *DEM BOW*

Dem Bow  
By Shabba Ranks  
Bobby Digital, 1990

The rhythm became widely known as “Dem Bow” due to the popularity of the 1990/1991 song of the same name by Shabba Ranks, which was produced by Bobby “Digital” Dixon, likewise using a sample from Steely and Cleve’s track. The lyrics are anti-imperialist (the title is Jamaican patois for “they bow”, with Ranks disparaging people who do so) and also anti-homosexual, as Ranks compares those who perform sodomy to those who submit to colonialism. Elements of the song’s riddim have been incorporated into over 80% of all reggaeton productions.

## ADDITIONAL READING

Wayne Marshall, "Dem Bow, Dembow, Dembo: Translation and Transnation in Reggaeton," *Lied und populäre Kultur / Song and Popular Culture* 53, *Populäres Lied in Lateinamerika / Popular Song in Latin America* (2008): 131-151, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20685604>.

"Reggaeton has been profoundly shaped and reshaped by transnational flows of people, music, and ideologies, and one can hear and trace these movements in the very forms of the songs themselves. This essay offers an overview of the history of the genre and the shifting shapes of its forms, as well as how these forms articulate with social and cultural movements, by following a particularly audible thread through time and space. Although reggaeton's national provenance remains a hotly disputed issue, attending to particular sonic details can provide a persuasive resolution of various claims to the genre, which has been defined, by various stake holders, as essentially Jamaican, Panamanian, North or Latin American, and/or Puerto Rican. Seeking to tease these threads out, my narrative begins with a seminal 1991 recording by Jamaican DJ/vocalist Shabba Ranks, Dem Bow. Not only has the song been covered, or re-recorded, by performers in Panama, New York, and San Juan, but elements of the song's accompaniment track (or riddim) appear in upwards of 80% of all reggaeton productions. Thus, dem bow - also recorded and referred to as son bow, dembow, and dembo, among others, demonstrating the mutations of translation and localization - offers a rich set of examples for understanding the transnational transformations so central to reggaeton's aesthetics and cultural politics. The changing shapes and enduring elements of DEM BOW illuminate in particular how migration and commercialization have contributed to the formation of a genre which today stands as one of the most popular youth musics across the Americas.

More specifically, an examination of the transformations of DEM BOW calls attention to some of the central political commitments underpinning reggaeton's resonance, as well as how this orientation - the very cultural politics of the genre itself - has changed rather radically over time, especially with the genre's increasing appeal to a "mainstream," pan-Latino listenership. Since reggaeton emerged as a viable commercial product capable of transcending its initially subcultural or "underground" audience, in particular with the pop chart success of N.O.R.E.'s *Oye Mi Canto* (2004) and Daddy Yankee's *Gasolina* (2005), it has been hailed as a symbol not just of important demographic trends in the US but of an emergent pan-Latin American identity. In the process, however, reggaeton has also undergone a kind of whitening, or BLANQUEAMIENTO, and a "cleaning up" to befit the commercial aspirations of artists, producers, and other music-industrial entrepreneurs. During the mid-90s, artists and audiences alike referred to the music as MELAZA (molasses), MUSICA NEGRA, and even simply HIP-HOP and REGGAE, all evoking or intertwined with symbols of blackness. But with the move toward the mainstream in the new millennium, the genre increasingly found itself promoted as REGGAETON LATINO (as powerfully projected in a 2005 hit song by Don Omar), thus dovetailing with the pan-Latino marketing strategies of such media conglomerates as Univision and its LA KALLE radio franchises. Hence, whereas the genre had previously been aligned explicitly with a cultural politics grounded in racial community, with increasing commercialization and an expanded listener base, its vistas and pistas (i.e., the underlying tracks propelling reggaeton songs) seemed to shift accordingly. This trajectory, from MUSICA NEGRA to REGGAETON LATINO, can be heard in the changing shapes of DEM BOW: a song which begins as an anti-gay, anti-colonial anthem, implicitly interpolating its audience along the lines of race and nation, proceeds to be re-recorded, translated, and adapted with a good deal of its original thematic integrity preserved, but

## INTERLUDE- FROM UNDER MI SLENG TENG TO DEMBOW

ultimately finds itself defused and diffused, turned into a mere symbol of seduction, describing a distinctive, sexy, transnational and utterly marketable beat.”

### Discussion Questions:

- How What do you know about Reggaeton? What ideas do we have about what this music is written about? What kind of people do you hear talked about in reggaeton lyrics?

Reggaetón, doesn't just come from one place with strong development in Panama and Puerto Rico it is also influenced from hip hop, and dancehall music out of Jamaica. The genre like many popular music genres has faced criticism for its misogynistic themes—often portraying women as objects of desire and reinforcing gender stereotypes. Its commercial success has, at times, hinged on hypersexualized imagery and lyrics that perpetuate a narrow view of femininity. However, a growing wave of artists within the genre is challenging this legacy. Female Reggaetón performers like Ivy Queen, Villano Antillano, and Tokischa, as well as male allies like Bad Bunny, are reclaiming the genre as a space for empowerment, gender fluidity, and feminist expression. Through provocative lyrics and boundary-pushing visuals, they are reshaping Reggaetón's narrative, proving the genre can evolve beyond its roots without losing its cultural impact or popularity.

- Can you think of other genres of music that have been criticized in similar ways? Are there any other artists who you can think of who subvert misogyny or other forms of oppression in their art or music? How do they do that?
- Can you think of a specific beat, sound, or dance challenge that has spread globally through social media or popular music? How does that musical element stay recognizable even when different artists, from different places, incorporate it into their own songs?
- Think about the music you listen to or the slang you use: Did you learn it from someone who moved to your community, or did it travel through the internet or media? Do you feel that the music you listen to helps you define your identity, especially if that music comes from a culture, country, or marginalized community different from your own?
- Why do you think people, communities, or nations feel such a strong need to claim ownership or the origin of a style of music? In what ways does music become a symbol of national pride or cultural identity for your own community or the groups you know best?

# LESSON BLOCK 3

## SLACKNESS



Bobby Cruz (b. 1984, San Juan, Puerto Rico; lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico)  
Más Perreo, 2015  
Neon  
Courtesy of Private Collection

## LESSON BLOCK 3 – SLACKNESS

Dancehall and Reggaetón musicians and dancers use openly sexual expression, sometimes called “slackness,” to challenge traditional ideas about proper public behavior. This explicit focus on the body often clashes directly with the moral and class-based standards promoted by middle- and upper-class society.

While both genres have historically faced criticism for reinforcing negative gender roles, many participants use these forms to claim sexual independence—the freedom to express desire and make choices about their bodies on their own terms. This overt expression of sexuality is seen as a way for marginalized individuals to push back against the dominant culture and define their own value and beauty.

The dance move Perreo illustrates this defiance. Although the dance has been labeled “vulgar” because of its movements, women and queer folks adopt it to assert their right to sexual self-expression. By moving their bodies in this assertive way, participants actively challenge old social boundaries and the patriarchal systems that attempt to limit their choices. They are, in essence, claiming power by declaring their presence and their desire.

## GLOSSARY

| TERM                       | DEFINITION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Black Atlantic             | A scholarly concept describing the shared history and culture of people of African descent across the Atlantic Ocean, including the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe. This identity was formed through the experience of the slave trade (the Middle Passage) and continued migration.             |
| Dancehall Queen            | A female Dancehall performer and figure who asserts power and challenges traditional gender roles.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Decoloniality / Decolonial | A framework focused on reversing the persistence of colonial power structures, knowledge, and biases.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Eurocentric Ideals         | Standards of beauty, status, or aesthetics rooted in the culture and historical worldview of Europe. Dancehall culture is viewed as challenging these ideals.                                                                                                                                         |
| Gender Roles               | The social expectations and behaviors considered appropriate for different genders in a specific culture. Gender Stereotypes – Oversimplified and often biased ideas about how individuals should behave based on their gender.                                                                       |
| Impropriety / Indecency    | Behavior considered socially unacceptable or crude.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Misogynistic               | Showing hatred, dislike, or strong prejudice against women.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Non-binary Sexual Autonomy | The right and freedom of a person to express their sexuality and identity outside of traditional male/female expectations, and to make individual choices about their own body and sexual pleasure without control from others or the government.                                                     |
| Objectification            | The act of treating a person as a thing or object, rather than as an individual with full rights and feelings.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Patriarchal Notions        | Concepts derived from a social system where males hold primary power and dominance.                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Perreo                     | A Reggaetón dance style named after the Spanish word for dog, involving seductive, front-to-back hip movements. It is similar to twerking with a partner                                                                                                                                              |
| Polite Respectability      | Societal standards for proper public behavior, often rooted in middle- and upper-class Eurocentric ideals.                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Slackness                  | A Jamaican term for openly sexual expression in Dancehall, referring to dance moves and lyrical content. It is used to challenge traditional ideas about proper public behavior and polite respectability. Subversion – The act of challenging or undermining the authority of an established system. |
| Transgression              | An action that violates a rule or moral boundary.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

## LISTENING – YO PERREO SOLA

Open the lesson with some music. This lesson is about challenging polite respectability with dance.

**ASK** some questions to get students thinking about the dynamics of a social environment that includes dancing and flirting?

- Talk of a time you were at a celebration, how did you show up? Who was there? Did it inform how you dressed, talked acted?
- Was there a time when you felt excluded or like you didn't fit in? How about a time you fit in?
- What makes you feel most like yourself? When do you feel free?

**SHARE** the following track.

Yo Perreo Sola  
By Bad Bunny and Cita  
Bad Bunny and Tainy, 2020

**ASK** some questions to help students talk about what they are hearing.

- Does this sound familiar to anyone? Even if you don't recognize the song, does rhythm or texture remind you of something you do know?
- When do you think a song like this might play?

**BUILD** some context about the track and invite questions or new reflections.

Bad Bunny's song "Yo Perreo Sola" ("I Twerk Alone") is about independence and respect for women. The song speaks out against sexual harassment and supports a woman's right to enjoy herself at a club without being bothered. Written from a female point of view with singer Nesi, the song explains that a woman can choose to dance alone and should not receive unwanted attention. This message is made even stronger in the music video, where Bad Bunny dresses in drag to show how uncomfortable unwanted attention can be. The video ends with a clear message: if a woman does not want to dance with you, you should respect her choice.

- What are other songs that share similar messages?
- How is Bad Bunny using his platform? Do celebrities have a responsibility to use their platforms for good?
- Has a song or a piece of media ever changed your perspective on something?
- What role does art and music play in creating cultural change?

## LOOKING – *DIVINE*

Begin looking at the artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Laura Facey (b. 1959, Kingston, Jamaica; lives in Kingston, Jamaica)  
*Divine*, 2018  
Lignum vitae wood  
Courtesy of the artist



Adrian Boot (b. 1947, Location, Location; lives in Dorset, United Kingdom)  
*Dancehall Queens*, 2002  
Silver and photographic gelatin on photographic paper  
Courtesy of the artist

**ASK** some questions to help students look closely and begin a visual comparison.

- Why do you think the people in the photo are dressed that way? Have you ever picked out a special outfit for an event? What was it? How did it feel to be dressed up?
- Have you ever been forced to wear something? How did it feel? Was there ever a time when you felt like you had to change something about yourself to fit in or feel comfortable? What was that like? What did you feel like you had to change?
- Have you ever worn something to celebrate your individuality or identity? What did you wear, how did you feel?
- How do both these different artworks challenge and contradict expectations? How does it make us feel to see a norm challenged? Does anything change about how you see the norm?
- What feeling or attitude do these artworks convey to you?
- How does the photograph capture an aesthetics (fashion, pose, style) and confidence?
- How do the different materials—photography versus sculpture—affect how you perceive the movement and the body?

**BUILD** some context about Dancehall Queens.

The emergence of the Dancehall Queen in 1980s Jamaica coincided with a period when dancehall music was often characterized as violent, vulgar, and misogynistic, frequently featuring sexually explicit and homophobic lyrics. Despite this context, the Dancehall Queen became an important figure in the scene.

The Dancehall Queen is a femme performer who is judged and crowned in competitive events based on her unique dance moves, fashion, and stage presence. These women are often described as being sexy, desirable, erotic, and very empowered, with an understanding of their own sexuality.

Dancehall Queens assert their identity through fashion, wearing clothing that was considered very revealing at the time, showcasing their bodies. They often wear custom-made designs created by local dressmakers and tailors. Their attire is typically eye-catching, reflecting a “ghetto fabulous” aesthetic that manifests lower-class prosperity. They often wear blonde or red wigs and use extravagant designs to creatively register feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, and joy.

The moves performed by Dancehall Queens, such as the Butterfly dance credited to original Dancehall Queen Carlene, center on hip movements, continuing a centuries-long Black Atlantic performance tradition related to fertility rituals. The use of twerking or “wining” (rotating hips) in the dancehall is linked to the historical imperative for African peoples to perform as a requirement for life and survival.

Decoloniality focuses on dismantling power structures and biases (race, class, gender) that persist after the end of political colonization. In this context, using explicit sexuality and defining one’s own beauty and status is a direct rejection of polite respectability and Eurocentric ideals that are embedded within colonial society.

**ASK** some questions to deepen discussion.

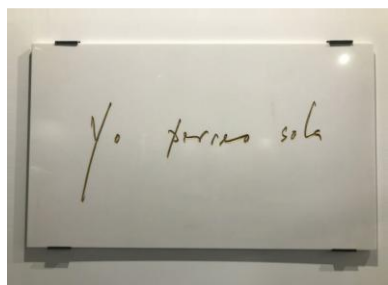
- How does the expression of Slackness—defined by openly sexual expression, provocative fashion, and defiant attitude—function as a political act?
- In what ways do these two artworks intentionally violate conventional expectations regarding how the female body should be publicly presented?
- Dancehall dance focuses on hip movements, continuing a centuries-long tradition linked to fertility rituals. How does knowing this history change your perspective on the artworks? Do you have any new associations?
- How do the decisions made by the Dancehall Queens about fashion, body size, and demeanor (e.g., larger-bodied women defining themselves as beautiful) become an explicit act of subversion against the moral and class-based standards inherited from colonial frameworks?

## LOOKING – *MÁS PERREO, YO PERREO SOLA*

Begin looking at the artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Bobby Cruz (b. 1984, San Juan, Puerto Rico; lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico)  
*Más Perreo*, 2015  
Neon  
Courtesy of Private Collection



Dagoberto Rodríguez (b. 1969, Caibarién, Cuba; lives in Madrid, Spain)  
*Yo Perreo Sola*, 2021  
material  
Courtesy of the artist

**ASK** some questions to encourage students to reflect on the two different phrases including “perreo.”

- What do the two phrases, “Yo perreo sola” (I dance perreo alone) and “Más Perreo” (More Perreo), suggest about the context and meaning of this dance?
- How do the materials influence how you perceive the importance or respectability of the message?

**BUILD** understanding by offering some further context about perreo.

Definition: Perreo is a Reggaetón dance style named after the Spanish word for dog, involving seductive front-to-back hip movements. It’s similar to twerking with a partner.

The dance has a history of being criminalized. In the early 2000s, Reggaetón and perreo were at the center of a campaign which sought to ban the dance. The dance was labeled as “vulgar” and associated with “sexual acts between dogs.”

## LESSON BLOCK 3- SLACKNESS

The phrases showcased in these artworks represent two powerful perspectives within Reggaetón culture: autonomy and demand.

"Yo perreo sola" (Dagoberto Rodríguez): This phrase references the popular song by Bad Bunny, who is one of the male allies reclaiming Reggaetón as a space for feminist expression. The phrase asserts the right to dance perreo alone. It is about autonomy and self-worth. The song itself has been viewed as part of a radical political discourse because it discusses women's empowerment and Bad Bunny's performance in drag.

By choosing this luxurious, permanent medium, the artist argues that the expression of feminine and non-binary sexual autonomy, typically condemned as "indecent" by the respectable status quo, is worthy of being presented as high culture.

"Más Perreo" (Bobby Cruz): This phrase is an insistent command: Give us more of this dance. It embodies the joy and defiant force linked to the economy of the popular music scene (similar to the visually striking hand-painted dancehall signs used to advertise parties and draw passersby). Using neon suggests a desire for perreo to be brightly visible and present in public/commercial spaces.

**ASK** some questions to help students connect the context to their own ideas about the lesson's themes.

- Can you think of a piece of slang, fashion, or music from your own life or community that is often dismissed or called "low-class," but which you believe holds cultural value or dignity?
- If the concept of perreo is about the freedom of the body to move and express itself, can you name a specific song, dance style, or gathering space (public or online) where you or your friends feel completely free to be yourselves, regardless of what mainstream society thinks? What elements (like the music, the style of dress, or the group around you) in that space make you feel visible, empowered, or liberated?

## ADDITIONAL READING

Gonzalez, Damaly. *"Reggaeton Feminista: Perreo as a Tool for Self-Empowerment."* Interventions (The Latinx Project, NYU), September 5.

<https://www.latinxproject.nyu.edu/interventions/reggaeton-feminista-perreo-as-a-tool-for-self-empowerment>

"There is a long history between reggaeton and perreo that has led this dance to become a powerful mechanism for liberation. From perreo to bellaqueo to now perreo combativo and neoperreo, the dance went through a period of censorship and derision before being recognized as today's global dance and in the process, unleashing a new generation perreando for the revolution.

### A Brief History of Perreo

Perreo goes back to the early beginnings of reggaeton, in that small nightclub in La Perla—The Noise. It's 1992 and everyone is vibing to Latin hip hop, a mix that crossed borders from Panamá to New York City to the Caribbean, forming what was called underground in Puerto Rico and that led to today's reggaeton, a term popularized by DJ Blass. Raperos are onstage with DJ Negro on the 1s and 2s, playing the beat and hyping up the crowd. The music is hard. Women are present, but the ones dancing are mostly men. The intensity of the masculine energy overwhelms the room, and the DJs knew it. Shabba Ranks' dembow riddim made its debut in 1990, but it wasn't until Smiley Wonder's sample that it eventually took over the world. Now, the riddim that made underground more sensual enters the scene and once DJ Negro drops that needle and plays that tra tra tra, there is no turning back. Las mamis and los papis were grinding to what was an African-derived dance called...perreo! And they didn't want anything else.

Perreo is kind of like twerking from Africa, kind of like Brazilian funk carioca, New Orleans bounce, or the Ivory Coast's mapouka, but not exactly. Perreo, also known as sandungueo, is uniquely caribeño; its ancestral lineage connected to enslaved Africans who were forcibly taken to Puerto Rico. As a consequence of European colonization, the communal dances brought by Africans were transformed into heterosexual pairings, which eventually influences perreo. Starting in the 1990s, however, perreo became increasingly misogynistic, sexist, and homophobic—not because the music influenced the culture, but because the music reflected it. As reggaeton developed from an expression of socioeconomic circumstances rooted in hundreds of years of colonialism, the music increasingly grew to be seen as a commodity. By the year 2000, more and more artists realized sex sells and the genre was penetrated with super sucio lyrics that not only further objectified women, but treated them as scapegoats for the "culture." Further, the visuals in the music videos were raunchy, vulgar, and over-sexed portrayals for the sake of sales, going so far as to show naked women.

The tipping point for this oversexualization was "Qué melones," a 2000 song by DJ Joe that talked about women's breasts in an explicit way, comparing them to melons:

Quítate la camisa / Y también el brasier / Ponte de frente que de frente que te quiero ver / Porque quiero chequear / A ver si es verdad / Si son pequeñas o son grandes / Hechas o natural / Qué melones, mami qué melones.

This song created a subgenre of reggaeton and perreo called bellaqueo which comes from the Puerto Rican slang bellaco, which roughly translates to 'very horny.' On the dance floor, bellaqueo means to go beyond dancing with someone: kissing, touching, etc.

## LESSON BLOCK 3- SLACKNESS

In contrast to “Qué melones,” Ivy Queen’s 2003 classic “Yo quiero bailar” counters the narrative of women as sexual props for men to a liberated woman who asserts what she does with her body:

Yo quiero bailar / Tú quieres sudar / Y pegarte a mí / El cuerpo rozar / Yo te digo: "sí, tú me puedes provocar" / Eso no quiere decir que pa' la cama voy.

These stark differences showed the tension and struggle between genders and sexuality in reggaeton that would eventually transform the music and how perreo would be perceived and used today.”

### Discussion Questions:

- How does taking a word meant to demean or insult a group and deliberately using it in music take power away from the oppressor? Can you think of any examples in your own community or media where a marginalized group has successfully repurposed an insult?
- Today, artists like Villano Antillano are openly reclaiming Reggaetón. Villano Antillano's work centers on her trans identity, asserting her right to womanhood and openly pushing back against those who deny her identity. Why would queer and trans people insist on reshaping and claiming genres like Dancehall and Reggaetón (which were part of the problem) rather than simply creating a brand new, separate genre?
- Have you ever been part of a group that intentionally created a space where the values were centered around care and healing, in contrast to the dominant, aggressive atmosphere elsewhere?

## MAKING – BODIES DANCILY, DANCE PHRASES

Explore creative movement, and expression through this introduction to dance.

### Materials:

Chairs  
White Board  
White Board Markers  
Speaker  
Laptop or Phone

### Directions:

To begin, the facilitator draws four big columns on the board labeled: Body, Energy, Space, and Time.

The facilitator explains that these are different elements to create an interesting dance. Ask the question below, have students answer with examples then fill in their answers in the columns on the board.

What are some ways we can use our body to change a dance or make an interesting dance in each of these categories?

Examples include:

Body: We can use our body parts, we can think about our body making shapes, our body and other bodies

Energy: We can use adverbs to describe how we are moving: angrily, scarily, joyfully.

Space: We can move through the room high, medium, low, across.

Time: Fast and slow and rhythm, pattern, non-pattern, totally wild

After defining these different methods of moving level up into this activity.

### NAME WRITING

Invite students to “Write your name in the air with your finger.” Repeat the motion of writing to the beat of a song. Play a song with a clear beat as students repeat their writing dance. An instrumental Dance Hall track is recommended.

Next, Introduce a change to the finger dance with one of the dance concept. You can take examples from the class of how to change the name dance. Some examples include:

“we can make it bigger!” that’s great that is a space change.

“we could make it stronger” that’s an energy change.

“lets do it with our knee” this is a body change.

“lets add a rhythm” now there is a time change.

## LESSON BLOCK 3- SLACKNESS

After the dance has evolved and the song is ending the facilitator will write two **NEW** lists on the board. One list is **BODY PARTS** and the other is **ADVERBS**. Write out five body parts on the board, encourage specificity and obscurity

Then ask for five adverbs, words that end in -LY, encouraging strange and specificity.

Use these combinations below or take suggestions from the class.

### Body Parts:

Nose

Kneecap

Shoulder

Pinkie Finger

Spine

### Adverbs:

Scarily

Lovingly

Uncontrollably

Lightly

Awkwardly

After the list the facilitator draws lines between body parts and adverbs to create combinations.

For example:

Nose – Scarily

Kneecap – Lovingly

Shoulder – Uncontrollably

Pinkie Finger – Lightly

Spine – Awkwardly

Then, have everyone create a big seated circle with their chairs where everyone can see each other.

Next, the facilitator introduces the first pair: ex. Nose- scarily. Invite everyone to take a second to think of how you create a move that is nose scarily and to begin moving “Nose-Scarily.” This

## LESSON BLOCK 3- SLACKNESS

could be a move that highlight nose, doesn't necessarily need to move the nose. As everyone is moving stop when there is a clear "answer" to "Nose-Scarily" that people react to.

Facilitator does the nose scarily move, then everyone does the nose scarily, one after another in a round.

After everyone has done the first move introduce more and more elements to the dance by combining the adverbs and body parts and following the above steps of exploring the move, identifying the "best" move and completing it in a round adding it to the first step.

Once the dance has five unique moves do the moves in succession all together.

### FINALE

The facilitator invites people to stand up out of their chairs. Have students go through their dance sequence again standing.

The facilitator asks students:

How does our dance sequence change when you are standing vs. sitting? How can these moves evolve once we are standing how can we incorporate the full body?

Students are invited to expand the dance to include the whole body by building on the original seated moves.

After the dance is completed, do one final performance and share a round of applause.

### REFLECTION

How did you feel about dancing before this activity? Did this change how you thought about dance?

How is it different to think of dancing in class versus in social spaces?

## GATHERING – STEADY, CAPABLE, SURE, CONFIDENCE MEDITATION

After practicing applying traits to different movements, switch up the tempo and invite students to slow down and pay attention to how they feel.

Before the meditation, create a comfortable space, dim the lights, play some light music. Invite students to sit in a comfortable place or to lie on the floor. This meditation is focused on finding confidence and isolating the feeling of confidence in a specific part of the body. This confidence can then be called back into focus in a moment where students need it. First students will focus on how they are feeling in the moment. Next, they will think of a time they felt confident. After identifying the time, they will isolate the feeling into a specific part of their body where that confidence feels strongest. The facilitator will follow along this script for five minutes leading students through the meditation.

### Script:

Find a comfortable position.

You can sit tall in your chair or relax back a bit, feet on the floor, hands resting loosely. If it feels okay, gently close your eyes. Let your mind settle.

With each breath, imagine your thoughts softening, begin to draw focus to your body.

Begin to focus on the bottom of your feet, and slowly scan your attention upwards. Begin to notice any attention to points of tension. Don't feel the need to judge or change how you feel, just notice it.

Once you have reached the crown of your head invite yourself to enter your mind.

Visualize your body in space. Imagine yourself in your favorite outfit. How do you feel?

Now, in your favorite outfit think back to a time when you felt truly confident.

Maybe it was finishing a big project, speaking up, making a team, helping someone, or creating something you were proud of.

It doesn't have to be a huge moment—just something that made you feel steady, capable, and sure of yourself.

Take a few seconds to bring that moment into focus.

As you remember that moment, notice where in your body you felt that confidence.

Was it a lift in your chest?

A warmth in your face?

A solid feeling in your stomach?

A straightening of your spine?

## LESSON BLOCK 3- SLACKNESS

A spark in your hands or feet?

There's no right answer. Just notice.

Let that place in your body become a little more awake right now, as if someone turned up the dimmer switch there by a few degrees.

Feel the confidence gathering, becoming strong, clear, and steady.

Now imagine that this part of your body holds a small core of glowing confidence—a warm, bright light, or a steady flame, or a solid stone—whatever image fits for you.

Isolate it there. Visualize it. Take a breath in... and let the confidence glow brighter.

Let this part of your body hold your confidence. Try and keep the focus on this part of your body.

Now imagine yourself moving through your day—walking into a classroom, a practice, a conversation, a challenge.

And picture yourself leading with that part of your body where your confidence lives.

If it's in your chest, imagine stepping forward with your chest open.

If it's your stomach, imagine that steady center guiding you.

If it's your hands, imagine them ready and capable.

If it's your feet, picture each step grounded and sure.

Whatever that spot is for you, let it lead.

Let it remind you of the confidence you remember and know.

Feel your feet on the floor, your hands resting, the air around you.

Let your eyes gently open when you're ready.

As you come back to the classroom remember:

Your confidence lives in you.

You can find it, return to it, and lead with it whenever you need.

# LESSON BLOCK 4

## PROTEST



Eric Rojas (b. 1988, San Juan, Puerto Rico; lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico)  
Ricky Martin (C), Puerto Rican rapper René Pérez, aka Residente, (R), Puerto Rican reggaetón singer  
Bad Bunny (T), take part of a demonstration demanding Governor Ricardo Rosselló's resignation in San  
Juan, Puerto Rico on July 17, 2019.

Digital Photograph  
Courtesy of the artist



MUSEUM OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART  
CHICAGO

## LESSON BLOCK 4 - PROTEST

Art and dance are direct forms of protest and action. The focus of this block is the 2019 protests in Puerto Rico, known as “Verano del ‘19”. This historic event mobilized communities against the oppressive governor Ricardo Rosselló, whose misogynistic, homophobic, and callous remarks demonstrated violent disregard for the people he governed. During this revolutionary moment, dance and music became powerful acts of political resistance.

The protests featured Reggaetón artists like Bad Bunny, Residente, and iLe, who mobilized their fame and voice to support the calls for change.

The explicit expression of sexuality was deployed as a direct political strategy—the practice of Perreo Combativo (combative perreo or twerking). The chants heard on the streets of Old San Juan, such as those that subverted polite respectability by reclaiming the word puta (e.g., “¡Put a antes que corrupto!”), explicitly rejected political corruption.

This final block analyzes how these non-traditional methods of dissent utilize the body and collective gathering as essential tools for asserting power and achieving liberation against oppressive regimes.

## GLOSSARY

| TERM                               | DEFINITION                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Allegory                           | A visual tool in art, such as a figure or symbol, that is used to represent a larger moral or political idea rather than a specific real person. For example, the figure of Liberty is used to represent the idea of freedom. |
| Appropriation                      | The intentional act of borrowing, copying, or taking cultural practices, words, or objects from their original context and transforming them to create a new political meaning or challenge authority.                        |
| Colonial Frameworks                | The political and social structures established by former colonizers.                                                                                                                                                         |
| Heteropatriarchal                  | A social system that gives primary power and dominance to heterosexual men. It uses the traditional male-female family unit to maintain social control and limit the sexual freedom of women and queer individuals.           |
| Nonreproductive Pleasure           | Sexual expression and desire that is not linked to the goal of having children or meeting the political and social expectations that sex must serve the purpose of reproducing the nation.                                    |
| Non-traditional Methods of Dissent | Behavior considered socially unacceptable or crude.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Oppressive Regimes                 | A ruling government or system that unjustly restricts the rights, freedoms, and self-determination of its citizens, against which communities assert power and liberation.                                                    |
| Perreo Combativo                   | A specific protest strategy involving “combative twerking” used as political action to fight against unjust colonial frameworks and protest corruption.                                                                       |
| Personification                    | The act of representing an abstract idea or quality in human form.                                                                                                                                                            |
| Racialized/Gendered body           | The physical body understood as an object that is controlled, defined, and policed by social structures based on its race, class, and gender identity                                                                         |

## LISTENING – *AFFILANDO LOS CUCHILLOS*

Open the lesson with some music. This lesson is about standing up for what you believe in.

**ASK** some questions to get students thinking about their experience with protest.

- What was a time you took a stand?
- What were you standing up for?
- Who was there with you?
- Where was it?
- How did you do it?
- How did it feel?

**SHARE** the following track.

Affilando los Cuchillos  
By Bad Bunny, Residente, and iLe  
Residents de calle, 2019

**ASK** some questions to help students talk about what they are hearing.

- Do you notice any ways the evocative title “sharpening the knives” show up musically in this track?
- What musical elements help to emphasize the defiant aspects of the message?

**SHARE** this short segment about the track to provide more context.

Felix Contreras, "A Puerto Rico Protest Song: 'Afilando Los Cuchillos,'" All Things Considered (NPR), July 28, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/28/746089844/a-puerto-rico-protest-song-afilando-los-cuchillos>.

**ASK** some questions to help students think deeper about the track.

- The song was entirely written, recorded, and released for free on YouTube within 24 hours. How does the ability to create and distribute a powerful political message almost instantly change the relationship between artists, protest movements, and traditional media like radio or news outlets?
- What unique power do major celebrity artists bring to a local political protest? Why might their public involvement legitimize or amplify the struggle to a global audience? Are there any downsides?
- Why would artists choose to risk alienating conservative listeners by using offensive language to denounce a politician?

## LOOKING – *ERICA ROJAS*

Begin looking at the artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Eric Rojas (b. 1988, San Juan, Puerto Rico; lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico)  
Ricky Martin (C), Puerto Rican rapper René Pérez, aka Residente, (R), Puerto Rican reggaetón singer Bad Bunny (T), take part of a demonstration demanding Governor Ricardo Rosselló's resignation in San Juan, Puerto Rico on July 17, 2019.  
Digital Photograph  
Courtesy of the artist

**ASK** some questions to help students look closely and begin to analyze the image.

What kind of event is this? How can you tell?

What is the energy of the protest?

Can you read any of the signs? What do you think they are protesting?

Who are the people in this image? Can you make any of them out?

The person holding the flag is the musician Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio better known as Bad Bunny. What do you already know about him?

Have you ever seen images of celebrities at protests? What did it make you feel?

Does this image remind you of any other images you have seen before?

**BUILD** further context while inviting students to find similarities between Rojas photograph and another artwork: Eugene Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830.



Delacroix, Eugène.  
*Liberty Leading the People*. 1830. Oil on canvas.  
Louvre Museum.

What similarities do you see with this image? What do you think these people are protesting? How does it look different?

How do we encounter images from protests or other political movements? What do the images look like? Where do you find them? Why do we take pictures? What role do images play in political movements?

Delacroix's painting is centered on the allegorical figure of Liberty, a nude-to-the-waist personification of the idea of freedom. Rojas's photograph features the musician Bad Bunny at the peak of the crowd. Both figures occupy the visual peak of the composition. What do these different people suggest about how we should understand revolution in the 21st century?

Delacroix's Liberty wears the Phrygian cap, a classical signifier of freedom given to freed slaves in ancient Rome. In Rojas's image, Bad Bunny wears Nopeet shield glasses and a face mask. What do these contemporary symbols—often associated with style, privacy, or self-protection—suggest about the nature of political protest and visibility in the age of digital media and government surveillance?

Both central figures hold the national flag. Liberty raises the French tricolor, while Bad Bunny holds the Puerto Rican flag. Residente commented that during the Verano del '19, Puerto Ricans of opposite political persuasions stood behind the country's flag as a symbol of unity.

- How does the act of holding the national flag function as a symbol of unity and a rejection of corruption in that nation?

Delacroix intentionally included figures of all social classes—a worker in an apron, a middle-class man in the top hat, and a schoolboy—to suggest that the revolution was for everyone. The Verano del '19 protests were similarly inclusive.

- What are the visible signs in the Rojas photograph (clothing, accessories, position in the crowd) that suggest this protest unified people from diverse social classes, sexualities, and communities?

Delacroix's protesters carry military weapons (a bayonetted musket, pistols) used for conflict on barricades. In the Puerto Rican protests, dance and music became acts of resistance.

- What are the non-traditional instruments of dissent pictured in Rojas photograph?

## LOOKING – *UNTITLED (RICKY RENUNCIA)*

Begin looking at the artwork together. Share an image of the following artwork. Small images are included here for reference purposes. Full resolution images to share with students are included in the accompanying slide deck.



Untitled (Ricky Renuncia), 2019  
Supakid (b. 1985, Bayamón, Puerto Rico; lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico)  
Digital Photograph  
Courtesy of the artist

**ASK** students to look closely at the photograph. It documents a specific moment during the massive protests that took place in Puerto Rico in the summer of 2019 (*Verano del '19*). Focus on the woman in the foreground and the message on her T-shirt.

- What does the message on the T-shirt suggest about the relationship between dancing and revolution? ("If I can't dance perreo, it's not my revolution.")
- Why might dancing, an activity often associated with fun or entertainment, be considered a form of political protest in this context?
- How does the woman's pose, attitude, or style suggest defiance?

**BUILD** some context to help deepen understanding.

This photograph documents the Perreo party or Combative Twerking (Perreo Combativo) event that took place in San Juan during the protests to demand the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló.

The slogan on the t-shirt reflects the central strategy of Perreo Combativo: using expressive dance—specifically the Reggaetón dance style known as perreo—as a political tool against an oppressive government that had demonstrated misogynistic and homophobic disregard for its people.

Perreo involves seductive front-to-back hip movements, similar to twerking, and the dance is traditionally categorized as "vulgar."

The Perreo Combativo event was convened by queer individuals (LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming youth) and allies. It famously occurred on the steps of the central church of the capital, San Juan's Cathedral. By performing this explicit, sexualized dance in a sacred and traditional space, the protesters were intentionally disrupting heteropatriarchal system and the norms that had historically condemned their sexual freedom.

The dance was a way of "putting the body" (poner el cuerpo) forward, asserting the "erotic body as a political instrument of dissent." For non-white, femme, and queer individuals, this act becomes a means to alter culture and an act of decolonial joy.

**ASK** some questions to help students go deeper.

The message on the T-shirt captures the idea that liberation must include the right to uninhibited, expressive movement and the freedom to celebrate one's identity and sexuality, even through practices considered "vulgar" by some.

The protests were sparked partly by leaked chats where the governor and his allies used misogynistic and homophobic slurs.

- How does the decision to use a sexually explicit dance as a weapon of protest turn the tables on those who tried to control and condemn the people's bodies and behavior?
- The sign says, "If I can't dance perreo, it's not my revolution." What does this phrase suggest about the difference between a political revolution fought only with traditional speeches and laws versus one fought through culture, joy, and physical expression?

## ADDITIONAL READING

Rocío Zambrana, "Subversive Interruption," in *Colonial Debts: The Case of Puerto Rico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2k057zg.8>

"It is instructive to consider, however, *el perreo intenso* at the footsteps of San Juan's Cathedral. It is exemplary of offensive protest through the affirmation of shamelessness, pleasure, and nonproductivity. *El perreo intenso* came to be known as *perreo combativo* as well, thanks to a tweet by Tommy Torres, Ilean Perez writes in "Poner el cuerpo." Rossello posted a prerecorded video with his resignation on Facebook on the evening of July 24. The video was to be released at 11 p.m., but problems with the upload meant that it aired close to midnight. There were various calls for *perreo* in the streets of old San Juan that evening, including one by Guayoteo, a party collective. The LGBTIQ community convened *el perreo intenso* on the footsteps of la Catedral. Earlier in the day, they had staged a *grajeada combativa*, combative make-out, in this space as well. Videos of *el perreo intenso* went viral. Guayoteo posted a statement distancing themselves from the protest at the cathedral, clarifying that they had acquired the city's permission and that the other group made them "look bad." The archbishop of San Juan tweeted: "We repudiate the disrespect for the Cathedral of San Juan because the cathedral represents the transcendent values of our Puerto Rican culture. And although we are aware that it is a protest against the Governor of Puerto Rico, which should have already resigned, we cannot allow disrespect for our national and religious symbols." A week later, "acts of reparation" on the part of the religious community sought to cleanse the supposedly defiled cathedral.

Unlike Rebollo-Gil's examples beyond the student strike, like the breaking of the windows of Banco Popular, *el perreo intenso* was a decisively political act, given the space it occupied, the context it referenced, and the history it indexed. We must recall that *perreo*, dance associated with reggaetón, was at the center of the 2002 Anti-Pornography Campaign in Puerto Rico. Multiple Senate hearings articulated a discourse of "disreputability, respectability, and honor" in this context. These processes are inseparable from the long history of disciplining populations into "decency" that installed the race/gender/class norm, as Petra Rivera-Rideau argues referencing Eileen Findlay's landmark work on the imposition of decency in Puerto Rico. Reggaeton developed in barrios and caseríos during the 1980s and 1990s and was criminalized in the context of *Mano Dura*, as Mayra Santos Febres and Raquel Z. Rivera have documented. In 1995, the Drugs and Vice Control Bureau of the Police Department of Puerto Rico raided six record stores in San Juan. Public debate about the "violence" and "vulgarity" of reggaeton and *perreo* in great part responded to the success of religious groups in linking race, poverty, indecency, drugs and sexual "deviance." Raids impacted the LGBTIQ community and sex workers as well. As Rivera puts it, "underground's self-identification with ghetto hardness and lawlessness was an attempt at vindicating urban marginality." For the state/religious right, such affirmation was a form of "cultural contagion," where the margins posed a normative threat to be contained. *El perreo intenso* on the evening of July 24 can be seen as a queer appropriation of reggaeton (and trap), an affirmation of despised sexualities and nonreproductive pleasure.

In "Paro Nacional, *perreo*, y Antonio Pantojas," Yoryie Irrizarry writes: "There, on those steps, all together (*todes juntas*), lgbtq+ and hetero, maricones, buchas, and femmes, trans and cis, and nonbinary, young and not so young, released their bodies, delivering them in playful abandonment, to the rhythm, to pleasure (*goce*). Sweating and *perreando*, hasta abajo. That happened there on the steps of one of the institutions that has persecuted us the most, that has continuously tried to control our bodies (*nuestros cuerpos*) not only from its pulpits, but also by lobbying against the elimination of sodomy laws, laws that assign clothing according to genitalia, arbitrary guardians of concepts such as 'decency' and 'values' that are constantly used against poor people, against young people, against women, and against queer people." The

## LESSON BLOCK 4 - PROTEST

ongoing alliance between religious fundamentalism and the state within the debt crisis intensifies the erosion of LGBTQ and gestating bodies' reproductive rights.

El perreo intenso indexed and subverted a history of antiblack violence as well. In response to the religious indignation about the supposed defilement of the cathedral, Yolanda Arroyo-Pizzaro noted the cathedral's history. The cathedral was built in 1521. It is one of the oldest buildings in San Juan and the oldest cathedral in the United States and its territories. It houses the tomb of Juan Ponce de León. Within its walls and on its steps, enslaved people were bought and sold, women were persecuted. El perreo intenso indexed, then, the continuation of a history of violence recorded on those very walls and steps.

Perrear on the steps of the cathedral, I want to suggest, interrupts the construction of the body-territory, of the body-colony: the racialized/gendered body as something to contain, bound, control, extract, police. It affirmed the use of the body in "illegitimate" ways *sin vergüenza*, shamelessly, not merely as an expression of pride. Lawrence La Fountain's discussion of queer *sinvergüencería* is insightful here. He argues that "to be a *sinvergüenza* is to have no shame: to disobey, break the law, disrespect authority (the family, the church, the state), and in a perverse and curious way to be proud of one's transgression, or at the very least lack a feeling of guilt." That lack of guilt, that defiant excess, that affirmation of impropriety and indecency has the potential to turn inoperative the race/gender/class norm."

### Discussion Questions

- Think about a time when you saw or heard about a protest that used unusual or "rude" tactics (like shouting, disrupting traffic, or using shocking humor). Why do activists sometimes choose actions that cause offense?
- Do you agree with the idea that a protest is sometimes "hopeful" only if it is difficult to accept by those in power?
- What does it mean to use your body as a political instrument (*poner el cuerpo*)?
- Why does performing an assertive dance like perreo make the act of resistance more powerful for people whose bodies and identities have been historically policed? Why is expressing joy, pleasure, or fun a crucial part of resistance, especially when facing hardship or political corruption?

## MAKING – SWEATY PALMS, PRINTMAKING WITH THE BODY

Create a mark of the effects of dance on the body by making Living Lithography prints of students after a dance party.

### Materials

Aluminum foil  
Smooth card  
Masking tape  
Newsprint  
Cotton rags  
Cola  
Vegetable oil  
Clean Sponge  
Roller  
Glass for inking  
Oil based printing ink  
Paper for printing  
Wooden spoon

### Directions

To prepare the plate, tear off a sheet of tin foil and place it shiny side up on a very clean sheet of paper. Place a piece of mount board or an old etching plate in the center, then fold the foil edges over the board to form the back of the plate and tape them securely. Carefully turn the plate over, making sure not to touch the front (the matte side).

After all materials are prepared, invite students to have a short dance party. Play some of their favorite songs and encourage them to dance for five to ten minutes. Afterwards, have students press a part of their body with visible skin onto the prepared plate. Any area that contains natural oils will appear in the final print.

If students wish, they may also use oil-based materials such as Sharpie, oil pastel, or oily soap to add to their image. Allow the image to dry; a hair dryer may be used to speed up the process.

When you are satisfied with the image, pour cola over the plate from both directions over a sink or container. The cola can be reused for other plates. Rinse the plate with water to remove the cola, then gently clean the plate with a rag and a small amount of vegetable oil.

Roll out some oil-based printing ink. Lightly dampen the plate with a clean sponge and clean water (not too wet), then roll on a thin layer of ink. The roller should be quiet, not “hissing.” Damp the plate again and roll another thin layer of ink. Repeat until a visible ink film appears on the surface. If the white areas begin to fill with ink, wipe them with a small amount of cola. This can occur due to over-inking, the plate drying out during inking, or overly alkaline sponge water.

Give the plate a final gentle wipe with the damp sponge, then place it side up. Carefully position the printing paper on top of the plate and cover with newsprint (or greaseproof paper if printing by hand). Print by rubbing a spoon over the plate.

To make additional prints, repeat the inking and wiping process. If handled carefully and the foil remains intact, many prints can be pulled from a single plate.

## GATHERING – TAKE IT OUTSIDE, WHEATPASTING MESSAGES

Invite students to occupy a wall in your classroom as a reflection on the unit and an exercise in collective making.

Dedicate a wall in your classroom to be wheat pasted. This can be any wall that is clean and dry. Wheat paste is ephemeral and can be washed off with hot water, scrapers and fabric softener.

After the wall is dedicated as a student space, give students the invitation to cover the wall. For a specific ask invite them to occupy the wall with messages of protest, revolution, and self-expression they want to make visible. However, you can also leave the invitation vague and encourage students to take agency with what they fill the wall with.

Present students with big pieces of newsprint paper, drawing materials, painting materials etc.

Once they have collectively made their artworks, wheat paste them to the wall in your classroom following the instructions below.

### Materials

Flour  
Water  
Small pot  
Whisk or spoon  
Container with a lid  
Brush or sponge  
Paper or artwork printed on thinner paper  
Clean surface

### Wheat Paste Tutorial

Gather the materials flour, water, a small pot, a whisk or spoon, a brush or sponge, a container with a lid, and your printed or hand-drawn artwork on thin paper.

Next, to make the paste: In a pot, whisk 1 part flour with 2–3 parts water until smooth. Heat the mixture on medium, stirring constantly, until it thickens to the texture of thin pudding. Remove from heat, add a pinch of salt if desired, and let it cool.

Decorate the artwork you would like to wheatpasted use lightweight paper and make sure the surface you're pasting to is clean, and dry.

Apply the base layer: Use your brush or sponge to spread a thin, even coat of wheat paste onto the surface.

Carefully press your paper onto the pasted area, starting in the center and smoothing outward to remove air bubbles.

Brush another thin layer of wheat paste over the top of the paper, making sure the edges are fully coated and smoothed down.

Leave the piece undisturbed until it dries completely; the paste will turn clear as it dries.

Encourage students to think about other methods they can use to spread messages in their neighborhoods, the larger city, nationally, and globally.

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## ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

### LESSON BLOCK 1:

Perreo 101: The Basics Reggaeton vs. Regueton, La Gata

<https://youtu.be/ZLKrzU1UO9M?si=kYsxxYRwe54CJFWs>

#### Discussion Questions

- What do you know about Reggaeton? What ideas do we have about what this music is written about? What kind of people do you hear talked about in reggaeton lyrics?

- Reggaetón, doesn't just come from one place with strong development in Panama and Puerto Rico it is also influenced from hip hop, and dancehall music out of Jamaica. The genre like many popular music genres has faced criticism for its misogynistic themes—often portraying women as objects of desire and reinforcing gender stereotypes. Its commercial success has, at times, hinged on hypersexualized imagery and lyrics that perpetuate a narrow view of femininity. However, a growing wave of artists within the genre is challenging this legacy. Female Reggaetón performers like Ivy Queen, Villano Antillano, and Tokischa, as well as male allies like Bad Bunny, are reclaiming the genre as a space for empowerment, gender fluidity, and feminist expression. Through provocative lyrics and boundary-pushing visuals, they are reshaping Reggaetón's narrative, proving the genre can evolve beyond its roots without losing its cultural impact or popularity. Can you think of other genres of music that have been criticized in similar ways? Are there any other artists who you can think of who subvert misogyny or other forms of oppression in their art or music? How do they do that?

- Can you think of a specific beat, sound, or dance challenge that has spread globally through social media or popular music? How does that musical element stay recognizable even when different artists, from different places, incorporate it into their own songs?

- Think about the music you listen to or the slang you use: Did you learn it from someone who moved to your community, or did it travel through the internet or media? Do you feel that the music you listen to helps you define your identity, especially if that music comes from a culture, country, or marginalized community different from your own?

- Why do you think people, communities, or nations feel such a strong need to claim ownership or the origin of a style of music? In what ways does music become a symbol of national pride or cultural identity for your own community or the groups you know best?

## LESSON BLOCK 2

Everal Brown – Arts of the Americas, Organization of American States, accessed August 13, 2025, <https://www.oas.org/artsoftheamericas/everald-brown>.

“Brother Everal” Brown belongs to the family of self-taught and visionary artists, which curator José Gómez Sicre defined with the Spanish word *primitivos*, and in English have been referred to as folk artists. A member of the Ethiopian (Coptic) Orthodox Church, Brown’s various mediums of expression –painting, carving, and singing– were means of communicating spiritual visions to his brethren, as well as prayerful desires to the Almighty. An active Rastafarian, Brother Everal, his wife, and son, shared religious visions through the use of meditation and cannabis. Reggae music also served as a call to consciousness regarding the integration of social justice and spiritual fulfillment in Brown’s ministry. Totem is carved out of what looks like a slightly bent tree branch. From the bottom to the top, the sculpture consists of a small base representing the ground, some animals, and a group of seven figures, both male and female, one of which holds an infant. The figures literally become a totem as each one stands on the other’s shoulders. Their facial expressions range from joy to serious piety. The modesty and humility of the depicted figures stress the accessibility of salvation for the meek and disenfranchised. The grouping evokes a holy family, as well as a communion of saints reaching up to the heavens. The carving conveys both the interdependency of community and spirituality. Brown intended for works such as this Totem to convey an aspirational message of ascendancy and redemption. Everal Brown was born in Jamaica. A carpenter by trade, as well as a musician, painter, and carver, Brown was engaged with both Rastafarianism and reggae, and his art was imbued with older Afro-Jamaican popular culture, such as Revivalism and Kumina. Brown went by the name “Brother Everal” and as such in the early 1960s he established The Assembly of the Living, a mission of the Ethiopian (Coptic) Orthodox church, where the practices of Rastafarianism were carried out.”

Khytie K. Brown, “The Spirit of Dancehall: Embodying a New Nomos in Jamaica,” *Transition*, no. 125 (2017): 17–31, <https://transitionmagazine.fas.harvard.edu/the-spirit-of-dancehall-embodying-a-new-nomos-in-jamaica/>. JSTORtransitionmagazine.fas.harvard.edu

“As we approached the vicinity of the tent we heard the wailing voices, dominated by church women, singing old Jamaican spirituals. The heart beat riddim of the drums pulsed and reverberated, giving life to the chorus. “Alleluia!” “Praise God!” Indecipherable glossolalia punctuated the emphatic praise. The sounds were foreboding. Even at eleven years old, I held firmly to the disciplining of my body that my Catholic primary school so carefully cultivated. As people around me praised God and yelled obscenely in unknown tongues, giving their bodies over to the spirit in ecstatic dancing, marching, and rolling, it was imperative that I remained in control of my body. What if I too was suddenly overtaken by the spirit? It was particularly disconcerting as I was not convinced that there was a qualitative difference between being “inna di spirit [of God]” and possessed by other kinds of spirits.

In another ritual space, in the open air, lacking the shelter of a tent, heavy bass booms from sound boxes. The seismic tremors radiate from the center and can be felt early into the Kingston morning. The selector, in control of the microphone, speaks to his congregation. He exhorts men to, “Bring yuh queen and put down di machine!” and encourages women to “Bruck out gyal show yuh talent and skills!” Men and women gyrate and dance to the latest “riddims,” but more astonishingly, they perform acrobatic feats under the spell of the dancehall rhythms, feats reminiscent of altered states of consciousness. The bodies in this ritual dancehall space in Kingston, Jamaica are often perceived as wholly disparate from the bodies worshipping under the tent. The latter body is in service of the sacred and the other is given over to profanity. Yet, through my exploration of bodies and theologies in the African diaspora, I have come to realize

## LESSON BLOCK 4 - PROTEST

that these two kinds of bodies and rituals are perhaps engaged in not entirely dissimilar conversations. Both bodies are engaged in intimate meaning-making processes...

...Urban dwellers in places like Tivoli, Trench Town, and Sufferers Heights, Jamaica find themselves in a present that poses complex existential questions and challenges. Economic opportunities are bleak and unequally distributed and political corruption is rampant. While Jamaica has not had a civil war, there are perpetual uprisings from the inner cities and around the nation, as people protest dilapidated infrastructure, inadequate opportunities for education, blatant classism, and lack of social mobility for those who are not fortunate enough to be born into the right class and of the right color. Scholar Wayne Marshall describes Jamaica as having a “pigmentocracy,” in which opportunities for social mobility are dependent upon the color of one’s skin. The lighter skinned Jamaicans saturate the middle and upper class and are afforded more opportunities for leadership and economic success, while darker skinned Jamaicans are overrepresented in the lower ranks of society.

Jamaica exhibits the peculiar fragmentation that comes from colonialism; as a relatively new nation, experiencing *de jure* release from the British colonial grasp, it has been trying to come into its own with very few tools and a great deal of post-traumatic stress. Its childhood—the historical processes that gave birth to its status as an independent nation-state—is riddled with colonial, imperial, and capitalist conquests which fueled community violence, religious strife, cultural and social degradation, and economic, social, psychological, and spiritual trauma. The quest to reconstitute identities and the realization of an existence that is more promising than the present is played out in the urban streetscapes of Jamaica through the dancehall subculture. Dancehall is contested and criticized by onlookers for being wasteful, insensible, lascivious, and ostentatious; yet, it provides means for Jamaican urban dwellers to reimagine themselves and their circumstances innovatively. Dancehall culture provides counter-narratives in which the urban streets of Jamaica are transformed from limiting spaces, reminding people of what they do not have, to spaces for collective sustenance and self-affirmation where people can free up themselves.

“Dancehall is a rebel music. Anything rebel, society [don’t] like it.”

—Beenie Man (dancehall artist)

### Discussion Questions

- How does gathering with music in your own life—whether at an event, online, or in a specific physical space—allow you to express or define your identity, potentially making you feel more visible, respected, or most like yourself?
- When a large group gathers for a social event, how does the music, dance, and collective rhythm transform that crowd into a cohesive or powerful entity? What unique feelings of energy or shared purpose does the rhythm provide?
- The reading suggests that sacred (Revivalism/Rastafari) and secular (Dancehall) assemblies are engaged in “not entirely dissimilar conversations” and both allow practitioners to “garner a sense of belonging and control over their lives and destinies.” What connections do we see in the article between Revivalism and Rastafarianism and Dancehall culture? Discuss ways these very different types of gatherings function similarly as collective survival strategies against social hardship or injustice.
- Why might institutions or critics try to dismiss Dancehall as mere “fun entertainment” or “bugu-yahgah” music while treating religious or political congregations as serious and legitimate?

## LESSON BLOCK 3

Pacheco Muñoz, Joniel R. 2023. "TIPAS RARAS CARGANDO UN MOVIMIENTO: Reggaetón, Decoloniality, and Knowledge Through Subversion." *Caribbean Studies* 51, no. 2 (July-December): 3-31. Institute of Caribbean Studies, UPR, Río Piedras Campus. <https://doi.org/10.1353/crb.2023.a920694>

"While it is true that reggaetón reproduces patriarchal notions and objectification, as Hasta Abajo Project explains, in reggaetón, women in particular non-white and Black women—have also found a space to negotiate and explore pleasure (Feliciano-Graniela, 2021), inserting themselves as active participants in sexual interactions. By creating their own narratives, feminized people have rejected sexual roles, resisting the hegemonic notion of sexual binaries and reproduction geared sex. To fully understand reggaetón, we must transcend the notion that all sexual power dynamics are nonconsensual and misogynistic. We also need to recognize the limitations of traditional gender expectations on research and move to incorporate work that takes into consideration race, queerness, and other feminisms. And, of course, we must understand the nuances and contradictions contained within Caribbean musical genres, including how women and feminized people can exercise agency and negotiate their sexuality and destabilize the dominant constructions of respectability (Rivera, 2010), all while reproducing certain patriarchal ideologies (Gómez Arrieta & Miller, 2022). The transformations that el género has undergone are undeniable, including the ones driven by those who are women, queer, and/or Black. Because of these individuals that have created it, the genre has been labeled as apolitical by the hegemonic systems (Negrón-Muntaner & Rivera, 2009). Yet reggaetón is a space of resistance that has allowed the denunciation of socio-political oppressions, as well as serving as a tool to resist colonial subjugation, foster political change, and record daily struggles against the systems of power under which marginalized individuals live."

### Discussion Questions

- How does taking a word meant to demean or insult a group and deliberately using it in music take power away from the oppressor? Can you think of any examples in your own community or media where a marginalized group has successfully repurposed an insult?
- Today, artists like Villano Antillano (a trans woman) are openly reclaiming Reggaetón. Villano Antillano's work centers on trans identity, asserting her right to womanhood and openly pushing back against those who deny her identity. Why would queer and trans people insist on reshaping and claiming genres like Dancehall and Reggaetón (which were part of the problem) rather than simply creating a brand new, separate genre?
- Have you ever been part of a group that intentionally created a space where the values were centered around care and healing, in contrast to the dominant, aggressive atmosphere elsewhere?

## LESSON BLOCK 4

Aramburu, Diana. 2021. "Celebrating Erotic Autonomy: Decolonizing Desire in Vanessa Vilches Norat's 'Del dulce olor de sus pechos.'" *Confluencia* 36, no. 2 (Spring): 103–115. Colorado State University. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27109839>.

"iPutas antes que corrupto!", "iPutas pero no corruptas!", "Putas no, ¡putísimas!", and "¡Qué gobiernen las putas!" were just some of the chants that were heard on the streets of Old San Juan, during the July protests of 2019 in Puerto Rico, better known as the protests of the Verano del 19. During the Verano del 19, citizens took to the streets in response to a Puerto Rican government that had targeted and ridiculed them in a series of private chats that took place between the then governor, Ricardo Rosselló, and his top advisors and friends.<sup>1</sup> Published in their totality on July 13, 2019 by the Centro de Periodismo Investigativo, the 889 pages of chats, commonly referred to as "el chat de la infamia", sparked the protests that would begin the next day and that would ultimately lead to Rosselló's resignation on July 24, 2019 (Pérez 62). In these chats, Rosselló and his top officials referred to women as putas while also targeting the LGBTQ community and mocking citizens that had died as a result of Hurricane María.<sup>2</sup> For this very reason, many of the women that took to the streets during that July both (re)appropriated the word puta and "used their bodies as moving canvasses", to use Frances Negrón-Muntaner's terminology, in response to a corrupt government that has treated women, the LGBTQ community, and other vulnerable citizens as disposable bodies (see "Puerto Rico Remade"). According to Joseph Drexler-Dreis, decolonization involves dismantling how the other is positioned in Western thought by transcending these knowledge systems (39–42); in other words, "the possibility to be, think, and imagine in ways that are not beholden to the confines of the coloniality of power" (37).<sup>3</sup> It was precisely this coloniality of power that came under attack during the July protests through the use of the erotic body as a political instrument of dissent, especially during the sensuous "perreo combativo" (reggaetón dance style) on the steps of Old San Juan's Cathedral.<sup>4</sup> As Negrón-Muntaner comments, "That the majority of these practices put an emphasis on the body is significant. The protests were acts of self-creation at a time where people's bodies are literally on the line" ("Puerto Rico Remade"). The corporeal protests of the Verano del 19, therefore, articulate a new decolonial and emancipatory politics; one rooted in a celebration of the erotic and of previously marginalized bodies that disrupt the heteropatriarchy."

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"In the summer of 2019, riots and protests took place throughout the archipelago to demand the resignation of the elected governor Ricardo Rosselló. Bomba and plena were used as a basis for political chants (Espada-Brignoni & Ruiz-Alfaro,

2021). Reggaetón culture also played a major role in the resignation of the governor, as apparent in a motorcycle caravana and the involvement of internationally known artists such as iLe, Bad Bunny, and Residente, who both released music and participated in demonstrations (Residente, 2019). One protest that received significant attention was El Perreo Combativo, which took place in the central church of the capital, San Juan protesters made use of the perreo, a dance categorized as vulgar because it simulates sexual acts between dogs (Rivera, 2010). Another key characteristic of this protest was that queer individuals were a key focal point of the event. The imbrication of being queer, enjoying a racialized musical genre, and using said genre as a medium of political action caused a scandal."

## LESSON BLOCK 4 - PROTEST

### Discussion Questions

- Think about a time when you saw or heard about a protest that used unusual or “rude” tactics (like shouting, disrupting traffic, or using shocking humor). Why do activists sometimes choose actions that cause offense?
- Do you agree with the idea that a protest is sometimes “hopeful” only if it is difficult to accept by those in power?
- What does it mean to use your body as a political instrument (poner el cuerpo)?
- Why does performing an assertive dance like perreo make the act of resistance more powerful for people whose bodies and identities have been historically policed? Why is expressing joy, pleasure, or fun a crucial part of resistance, especially when facing hardship or political corruption?
- The protest song "Afilando los Cuchillos" ("Sharpening the Knives") by Bad Bunny, Residente, and iLe, was written, recorded, and immediately released for free on YouTube all within 24 hours. How did this rapid-fire production and distribution change the relationship between artists, political movements, and traditional media like news outlets, making the artists highly influential in amplifying the struggle?
- The movement utilized various non-traditional methods of dissent, including protesting on kayaks, horseback, and ATV vehicles. How does the act of transforming everyday objects or recreational activities into forms of mass protest function as a deliberate assertion of "decolonial joy" or sovereignty against an oppressive regime?