

What's "America" the God bless? How a Puerto Rican Artist Turned the Halftime Show into a Political Statement

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The annual halftime shows of the National Football League's championship game, the Super Bowl, has long transcended the format of mere entertainment, becoming a significant tradition that showcases the national interests and mentality of the USA. The performance by the Puerto Rican artist Bad Bunny at Super Bowl LX (2026) represents a unique instance where this well-established format became part of a powerful statement on the issue of American national identity. The thirteen-minute show at Levi's Stadium transformed, for the first time, into a genuine political "protest," prompting not only ordinary people but also key political figures in the States and abroad to reflect on the true cultural pattern of the Americans [2].

The aim of this study is to analyze Bad Bunny's performance at Super Bowl LX and demonstrate its impact as a mechanism of "soft power" [3], which generated polarization of intercultural interests within the United States. Through various forms of analysis, the study seeks to prove the political dimension of the event.

The main feature of the show was the deliberate foregrounding of the Spanish language and the Latin American cultural codes at the heart of a national American event [1][4]. Through linguistic means, choreography, and visual symbols, the concept of "America" was presented not as a synonym for the USA, but as a geographical and cultural unity of the continent [2]. This approach dismantles the long-established stereotype of the States' primacy over the North and South American continent, reframing it to address the demographic and electoral majority – the Latino community – which can rightfully be called the foundation, not the periphery, of the "new" America.

The sharp reaction from then-President Donald Trump, who characterized the show as an "insult to America's greatness" and called it "incomprehensible"[1], undoubtedly underscores the acuteness of the issue within political elite of the US [2]. This statement captures the perception of cultural representation as an indicator of political loyalty. In contrast, the Democratic politicians and liberal circles praised the performance as a step towards advancing multiculturalism. Polls conducted by Quinnipiac University confirmed this division, recording high support for the show among the Democrats and sharp disapproval among the Republicans, thereby validating the ideological differentiation within the United States [2].

From the perspective of international relations, this event gains significance within the framework of the concept of soft power. Soft power is the ability of a state to achieve its desired outcomes on the international arena through the attractiveness of its culture and values, rather than through coercion [3]. In the context of the historically complex relationship between the USA and Latin America, Bad Bunny's performance created a new communicative platform. The positive reaction of the public in the countries of the region amplified the symbolic significance of elevating Latin American culture to the centerpiece of a major American event. This generated a signal of cultural proximity and engagement, bolstering the regional image of the USA. However, the event also exposed a contradiction: the inclusive image projected abroad clashes

with intense domestic debates, rendering visible the gap between external image and internal political realities [2].

Thus, the Super Bowl LX halftime show serves as an example of how, through mass culture, the USA – via a famous artist like Bad Bunny – demonstrates the acute and growing problem of multiculturalism. America today is experiencing a certain rift concerning the understanding of national identity. The artist underscored the significance of linguistic, ethno-social, and intra-mental components in shaping the trajectory of US domestic policy amidst the transformation of the global political system.

Источники и литература

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