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# The Daily Cardinal

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University of Wisconsin-Madison Assistant Professor of History Jorell Meléndez-Badillo. Photo by Aurora Santiago Ortiz.

**ARTS**

## **UW professor's collaboration with Bad Bunny highlights Puerto Rican history**

## *Jorell Meléndez-Badillo contributed to 17 videos based on Puerto Rico's history for the artist's most recent album.*

By [Lydia Picotte](#)

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This winter, in a joint effort to highlight Puerto Rican history, University of Wisconsin-Madison assistant professor Jorell Meléndez-Badillo partnered with rapper Bad Bunny to educate through music.

The fruits of this collaboration are 17 videos, a visual for each song on Bad Bunny's latest album "DeBÍ TIRAR MÀS FOToS," released Jan. 5. Each video discusses a different piece of Puerto Rican history.

The project, which began as an Instagram DM from a member of Bad Bunny's team, was born out of the rapper's goal to teach more people — in Puerto Rico and around the world — about the island's rich history. Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, better known as Bad Bunny, is Puerto Rican himself.

The vision, Meléndez-Badillo told The Daily Cardinal, was to release a digestible and general history because right now, "not even Puerto Ricans know their own history."

The first drafts, which were 74 pages of handwritten notes, drew on research he'd done while writing his third book, "Puerto Rican National History." Some of the more niche topics touched on include the history of surveillance in Puerto Rico, the origins of Afro-Caribbean beats in the country and an entry on Sapo Concho, an endangered toad native to Puerto Rico.

Together, the videos have more than 300 million views on YouTube, and the impacts are already being felt internationally.

"I've gotten so many emails from schools and kids," Meléndez-Badillo told Cardinal. "Teachers in Puerto Rico are using this in the classroom to teach Puerto Rican history.. I've gotten to be in spaces that academics, particularly historians, are never invited to. To talk about first, Bad Bunny, but then really, we're talking about our history, our peoples and our culture," he said.

For him, this also marks the achievement of a personal goal that's been a long time coming. Not only is he a Bad Bunny fan but, as he noted, projects like this are the reason he entered the field of history.

"I wanted to take the knowledge that we produce within academia outside of the ivory tower," he said. "I come from a working class background. I'm the first in my family to be a Ph.D. student, I was the first to go to college. So for me democratizing knowledge is very important."

This ethic was shared by Bad Bunny, Meléndez-Badillo said.

"One thing that [Bad Bunny] has done throughout his career is that he [speaks to Puerto Ricans] first and foremost but he has this global platform, so that everyone else gets educated along the way. So for me this was a dream come true," he said. "I entered this profession because I wanted to share this knowledge widely."

Meléndez-Badillo has returned to more traditional academic work since completing this project. He is currently on research leave and writing his fourth book titled "A Counter Republic of Letters: A Friendship Revolution and Anarchist History Making."

Meléndez-Badillo described himself as a scholar of working class history and said that despite the musical detour, this has long been his primary focus. He's also working on a personal chronicle focusing on his lived experiences.

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