Latinos in the United States have faced many obstacles and challenges. Latino immigrants have migrated from their countries of origin for reasons ranging from the political to the personal.

Identified below are a few of the major challenges that Latinos faced in either coming to the United States or in living here. Next to the challenge provided, list a specific obstacle the respective cultural group faced. In the next column, list responses to each respective cultural group’s challenge(s). In the right hand column, list the more general contribution made to the United States as a result of the respective response.

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The following music genres and/or styles were created by Latino youth as a result of the social, economic, and political challenges facing them. Listen to the *American Sabor: Latinos in U.S. Popular Music* Audio Essays on salsa, Reggaetón, and hip hop and answer the following questions.

1. Define the following:
   - salsa ____________________________
   - Reggaetón _______________________
   - hip-hop _________________________

2. At what time period was the music created?
   - salsa ____________________________
   - Reggaetón _______________________
   - hip-hop _________________________

3. Who were/was leading Latino musical figure(s) who helped develop or define the music?
   - salsa ____________________________
   - Reggaetón _______________________
   - hip-hop _________________________

4. What were some of the issues that youth faced or addressed through each?
   - salsa ____________________________
   - Reggaetón _______________________
   - hip-hop _________________________
Juan Barco, Singer-Songwriter and Former Migrant Worker

[With] migrating all over the place, we went to many, many, many states. And we would always go home to Texas for Christmas...[But] Your destiny would change every day. There was no planning for the future; there was no planning for college or anything like that. It was just a matter of trying to exist from day to day. So the existence of migrant people was from day to day. And their success is based on how well they get along with each other, what kind of understanding they have with [each other] because it’s not only one family, but several families, that you travel together, that you have a set of rules, ethics, fairness, whatever. And so based on that, we travel everywhere, and yeah, there was times when somebody didn’t get paid, or something like that. Or the conditions were so poor. The labor camps in Minnesota, for example, in the north—they were very nice. They were better than our house back home, you know? Because our house back home had a dirt floor, part of it. The kitchen had a dirt floor, and in the bedroom, where we all slept in – it’s a two-room house, by the way – that had a wood floor, but it was made out of planks. It had the knots in the wood that were knocked out, so you’re always in peril of the scorpions and whatever came out of the little holes there. But, basically, we were the migrant experience. And I remember working next to braceros, which was a program that brought Mexicanos over from Mexico legally, to work in the United States. And conditions like in camps in Arizona, they were awful. I mean, I wrote a song for my brother, and it tells about when he died.  And it was a time when lots of migrant kids died in that year.

Yeah, they got sick. I don’t exactly know what it was, but it was some kind of a plague, and of course, if you were living in terrible conditions to begin with, you’re pretty susceptible to getting all this diseases. And so my sister’s first-born died, and my brother died, during that epidemic, in the course of about three days. And it hit fast, and hard. And it was in the fall of 1952. And so I wrote a song for those migrant kids, and it’s—I’m not making a plug for my CD, but it’s on the CD. And what happened, is that those are the kind of things that needed to be addressed. And the point that I was trying to make was that what made migrants successful – if you can say “success,” being a migrant family – was to stick together, to depend on each other, to trust each other, to take care of each other, and pretty much, you were on your own out there. But the bigger your family was, the better. But the minute that you start losing members of the family, either because they got married, or stayed in a particular state, they got a job, for example, or whatever, and you continue to migrate on, and your family becomes smaller. Then we had to find something different, because our family had gone – there was only some of us left, and only my father and my mom were the adults working, and my sister was 15. She was the eldest of the family. And all my older ones had gotten married. So we went to California, and we ended up running out of money in Gilroy, California. And we stayed there three days, and all we were eating was bologna and bread.
My father was always trying things out. He was the pioneer. He’s the one that led the families. My mother’s brothers and sisters, family related to him, cousins and everything, they would follow him, and we would just kind of stick together. And he was the unappointed leader. I mean, he just kind of took over and that was it. And so people really respected what he said, and I always thought my father was like Captain Kirk, because he would always go where no migrants had been before, and certainly not Tejanos. And I guess, when he took off, he knew a little bit of English, but not very much. And so, without having the navigation system that we have in cars now, where you just look things up, in those days, if you were lost, you had to ask for directions. And how would you ask for directions if you don’t know the language? So somehow or another, he figured it out, and we would end up getting to where we were going. And the thing about it, it was just like venturing into the unknown, you know? And it’s like I was saying – in Captain Kirk, you always knew that he was going to face aliens wherever he went, and heaven knows what they were going to do. They were going to try to get rid of him, or do something. He had no idea that where we went, they thought we were the aliens, you know? And that they had to do something about us. And eventually, that’s what’s still going on. It’s amazing that, from those days ’til today, where you read about, for example, CEOs who make all kinds of bucks, compared to the amount that has been increased in the wages of the migrants. It’s been very little, in comparison to today. It certainly hasn’t kept up with the cost of living, you know.

So anyway, going back to California, we kind of ventured to California [though] it wasn’t in our plan. We always would return to Texas. Instead my father thought he needed to do something different. And so in California, the beauty about if you’re a migrant, is that they had agricultural work year-round, because the climate permitted it. And so we were supposed to go to Selma, and we couldn’t find housing. We went to Fresno, and it was 113 that day, and on a letter that my mom found, she had a brother that lived in San Jose. So we were trying to get there, and we went to Los Banos, and it was so hot there. And I remember that my father knew that we were running out of money. And so I remember that day because we were—everything was parched. Everything—the grass, everything. There was nobody outside but us. We were having this little bologna sandwich picnic, and that’s the first time that I remember buying water. I mean, today, you know, you go to Costco and you buy water, whatever. But in those days, you didn’t buy water. It was free, right? But in there, they were selling water. And so he bought water, and we sat down at the little plaza, even though it was all brown grass and everything, as it gets when it’s terribly hot. And we had just started eating, and this freight train is going by there, you know, and making all kinds of noise. And then these two kids roll out of the freight train, and they’re Mexican. And they just walked over to where we were, and they were just staring at us, and we’re eating. And so my dad, he gave them a couple bucks. And we didn’t have that much bucks, and so he gave them a couple bucks, and they went in and bought something. And then they sat, and then they came over and sat with us. Well, I think one was 15, and the other one 14, or something like that. They were just trying to get to the United States to make some money and stuff. And so I always remember my dad sharing money when we didn’t have any. And then when we got to Gilroy, we didn’t have any.
And so we ended up staying there. And we were too late for the housing, and the work was great. I mean, there was garlic, there was the apricot season was in full, and prunes. So this man came and rescued us on the third day. He said, “Well, I have an old chicken coop kind of tool shed, that if you guys would clean up, you can move in.” So we went there, and moved in. And I remember that, because I have this scar, because I fell on some shears that were open, and made a big mess as we were cleaning the shed. And then we ended up, well, staying in California. We never went back to Texas, except to visit. And we found California, well, it was-- if you did agricultural work, Santa Clara Valley was rich with orchards. That was before Silicon Valley, you know. And so we had lots to do in terms of that. But it became an interesting part for me, because, you know—there was some music being played on the radio, and it was a lot of Norteño, and a lot of Tejano too. Well, not Tejano, but the conjunto regional. And very little Tejano. I remember we were picking prunes on day, and what they used to do—they used to have the cars. They would park them, they would move them up to where we were working, and whatever tree where we were picking prunes. And then they would open the door, and they would turn on the radio. And they would only leave it on for a little while, and then they turn the car a little bit on, so that the battery wouldn’t go dead. But that’s how we would listen to music all day. And I remember for the first time, hearing Sunny and the Sunliners, and I thought, “Hmm. That sounds good,” you know? Because it was a whole different kind of music. And that’s, I think, was Tejano music, you know, to me. Because everything else that was sounding conjunto regional, conjunto Norteño, conjunto de pitos, but never something like that, where it sounded like almost American, you know? And so it opened my ears to that kind of music, and I thought, “I’m going to—” [but] they didn’t say who it was. And it took me three or four or five years before I found that record, in Texas.

….But going back to the conditions [there was] a lot of unrest, and people were already talking about boycotting. And I was thinning lettuce. I was 21 years old. I had gone through high school. My mom and dad wanted my sister and I to be—well, they wanted for all of us to be something, but in those days, graduating from high school was a big achievement for any migrant, because none of us had, you know? And I was the first one to graduate. But from the sixth, seventh and eighth, I happened to live in the no-man’s zone—we were living in the center of San Jose, poor housing, but yet we were close to rich school, so we had to go to rich schools. Not private, but where the pretty affluent went to a junior high. And so, because we went there, I was able to take Spanish one, Spanish two, algebra, almost into trigonometry, and I was a straight A— not straight A, but maybe, like, four As, two Bs. Pretty much pretty high honor roll student. And during that time, I wanted to be a Spanish teacher. And that’s what my mom and dad wanted us to be. And then we moved from there to Milpitas, California. And when we went there, and I registered, I took all this courses so I could have, like, Spanish three, trigonometry, and follow up. And they said, “Sure, sure, kid. Are you sure? That’s a lot of credits,” and blah blah blah, you know? And the counselor kept saying, “Well, you know, that’s a lot of credits for a person like you.” And I said, well, “Why?” Everybody else takes them, don’t they?” And I had come from a good junior high, so when I reported to school, they gave me my schedule, and it was, like, woodshop, choir... study hall, general math-- I had taken general math in the sixth grade. And French. And I went and I complained to the principal, and they got really angry with me. They said that I should give white people a chance to learn how to speak Spanish, that I already knew how to speak Spanish. And I said, “But if I want to go to college, they require that you take at least three years of Spanish, if you want to major in that.” And they didn’t care. They said, “No, just give somebody else a chance.” So I became real disillusioned with school, and went back to working in the fields. And when I went back to working in the fields, then I started seeing the plight of the locals that were working there. People that had lived there all their lives, and they were having a hard time making it, and people-- the illegals—were coming in more. The so-called Mojados and stuff. And before I knew it, you know, I was 20 years old, and I got a letter, being drafted.
Juan Flores

“And so even when they were recording it they were trying to emulate the places where that music was mostly performed and enjoyed, which was parties, you know house parties and parties in the neighborhood and parties in the [recreation] rooms of the [housing] projects and stuff like that, that’s where the most of the time of boogaloo was enjoyed, it wasn’t in the big clubs...these people couldn’t afford to go to the Palladium...they couldn’t go to clubs, it was like early hip hop you know, like the reason for early hip hop was the kids couldn’t afford to go to disco clubs so do it in the street, do it in the playground, you know plug it into the lamp post you know and do it that way, so that’s how it all started well boogaloo was an early anticipation of hip hop in a lot of ways, some 20, maybe 15 years before hip hop hit the scene you had this kind of music, this strange combination of African American and Latin or Puerto Rican kind of sound coming together. Not to say that hip hop sounds like boogaloo, it’s very different musically group but it’s the same kind of social practice, the same kind of musical practice that came into play, it was overwhelmingly down home, street corner, house party kind of music and basically that’s what boogaloo is, boogaloo’s a party. As we know from a lot of music’s, the names for the music actually refer to a party... it’s very functional and it’s representative of where the community is at, I mean, it’s what the community wants you know it’s music that they can completely embrace and identify with including generationally, you know this is a music of young people coming up at that time who were born and raised in the streets of New York City... each generation needs its own style... so boogaloo represented that 60s generation of young Latinos coming up and finding their own voice and their own rhythm for themselves, just as hip hop did when salsa began to fade in it’s supremacy as a Latin form something cropped up, something new came up and that was the beginnings of hip-hop that this generation liked salsa had nothing against it but it was the music of their parents. You know and that’s where [Reggaetón] comes in because hip hop was the music of their parents you know so generation after generation new styles emerge and the Latin expression takes its new shape in some kind of configuration with American music and other music because now we have global music you know so it’s not only American but Panamanian, Brazilian play themselves into the sound track of the new generation.”