

PR Case Studies Midterm Report

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Case Synopsis

Organization

Lin-Manuel Miranda is a Tony-Award winning composer, lyricist, playwright, singer, and actor, known and beloved in the theatre community for creating and starring in the hit Broadway shows *Hamilton* and *In The Heights*. He achieved more mainstream fame and influence in writing the songs for Disney's *Moana* and starring in *Mary Poppins Returns*. Miranda is an outspoken advocate for Latinx socio-political issues, and is credited for advancing efforts in diversity and representation in the entertainment industry.

Objectives

When *Hamilton* first premiered on Broadway to stellar reviews in 2015, Miranda knew that he wanted to take the show to Puerto Rico as soon as possible, as he'd done with his first musical, *In the Heights*, years earlier, one of the few opportunities the island had had to experience Broadway shows, as touring companies rarely come to PR due to the high shipping costs of transferring sets from the mainland (Atlantic). Then came Hurricane Maria in 2017, devastating the island and leaving the entire population without power, access to clean water and food resources, resulting in approximately 3,000 deaths (Mercy Corps). According to Jeffrey Seller, the show's producer, this entirely changed the purpose and meaning behind *Hamilton*'s arrival on the island. "Instead of a simple homecoming, *Hamilton* in Puerto Rico would become a fundraising venture, a tourism lure, and a declaration of support for the island's recovery." (Atlantic) The focus of the initiative was a partnership with the Flamboyant Foundation to create The Flamboyant Arts Fund, which would provide support for institutions, arts groups, and independent artists on the island to continue to grow and rebuild (Fortune)



Key Stakeholders & Publics

On the mainland, the key stakeholders and publics include primarily American theatre fans wanting to support Miranda's work in various capacities, either donating to the fund or buying a show ticket and travelling to Puerto Rico to see it. As the production more directly impacted the island of Puerto Rico in many sectors, the key stakeholders and publics include 1) The Flamboyant Foundation which depended on the production's success for fundraising efforts 2) The citizens of Puerto Rico, who were given the exclusive opportunity to receive \$10 lottery

tickets 3) The students and faculty of Universidad de Puerto Rico (UPI) that were directly impacted by the production's original venue on campus.

Key Messaging

The themes at the core of the initiative were to promote pride and appreciation for Puerto Rican people and culture, using theatre as a vehicle for eliciting progress. All media relations surrounding the production emphasized heartfelt expressions focused on uplifting the island and its people.

Programming/Events

Hamilton played at the Centro de Bellas Artes Luis A. Ferré in San Juan for a three week engagement starting on January 11, 2019. Directly following opening night, a press conference was held in the theater where Lin-Manuel Miranda answered questions for a bilingual press corps. To promote the show, Lin-Manuel and the touring cast of Hamilton appeared on a special episode of *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon in Puerto Rico*.

Outcome

According to Fortune, The Flamboyant Organization reported that the limited-term fund raised \$14 million through ticket sales, corporate sponsorships, and individual foundation donations.

Analysis

Lin-Manuel Miranda acts as a pitch-perfect spokesperson with the expertise, personality, and authenticity to generate support for his cause.

Seeing as the man acted as the playwright, composer, lyricist, and title-role star of the original production of *Hamilton*, no other individual could represent the show's arrival in Puerto Rico better than Lin-Manuel. No one could tell the public more about the story, history and purpose behind the musical, but in the case of bringing Broadway to Puerto Rico, Lin-Manuel proves that his expertise and authenticity reach beyond the streets of New York City. His parents, Luis and Luz Miranda, were born and raised in Puerto Rico, and brought their family back to the island during the summer each year while Lin-Manuel was growing up (New Yorker). Being immersed in the culture gave a young Lin a strong appreciation for Puerto Rican people and culture, and this coupled with his father's passion for advocacy work, provides him with a sense of authenticity not typically found in any other type of relief organization. When Lin-Manuel speaks about Puerto Rico and what it means to him, you can feel that the issues are close to his heart; he feels like their loss is his loss, and their prosperity is his prosperity. His authenticity also shines through when he discusses what it means for him to bringing his most famous

creation to the island, saying “I’m like a little kid with it; I just want you to be proud of what I made.”(Atlantic)

In contrast to Michael Bloomberg’s campaign to enforce healthier lifestyles for the people of New York, Miranda is about as stark as it gets. Where Bloomberg, nicknamed the “Nanny Mayor” used bully-like tactics to enforce



a ban on sugar drinks in the “solving” obesity, Miranda’s platform utilized emotional persuasion and positivity to bring awareness to PR’s lingering issues, encourage donations and support for relief aid and Puerto Rican arts initiatives. The lack of personality and charisma presented by Bloomberg caused the public to respond in resentment and ridicule, Miranda’s natural charm and passion for the project, seen in his many interviews and appearances made to promote the show, arguably contributed to the success of Hamilton in Puerto Rico in the greatest proportion.

The societal impacts of the production, such as increasing tourism and supporting relief efforts, shows that one organization or event has the power to spark major change.

One of Lin-Manuel’s goals in bringing *Hamilton* to Puerto Rico was to call simultaneous attention to the island’s lasting devastation and continued growth. Miranda said on opening night, “People are going to come to Puerto Rico because of ‘Hamilton,’ and hopefully spend a lot of money here. But they’re also going to see blue tarps, and they’re also going to see how much work there is to be done.”(New York Times) According to the New York Times, about 20 members of the U.S. Congress visited areas of Puerto Rico damaged by the hurricane, and came to see the show during its opening weekend.(New York Times) Hamilton’s arrival on the island indeed had more than just a positive impact on the arts, as fans of Miranda/Hamilton, as well as those interested in aiding relief efforts, flocked to the island, increasing tourism and stimulating the economy, in turn helping shift public perception of Puerto Rico. “There’s an increased awareness of Puerto Rico, which is an opportunity for us to motivate people to travel,” Carla Campos, the executive director of the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, told The New Yorker. “...We really don’t want to perpetuate that sense of crisis, because it is detached from reality.”(The New Yorker)

Hamilton’s catalytic impact on the refocusing Puerto Rico’s image and helping to reinvigorate tourism and the economy directly relates to the Five Seasons of Salem case study. The economies of Puerto Rico and Salem both heavily rely on tourism and revenue from restaurants, hotels, and retail. In the rebranding of Salem, the focus was put on highlighting attractions and

opportunities that would appeal to a wide variety of visitors, not just those looking for a witch-themed Halloween destination. Similarly, the influence of *Hamilton* on Puerto Rico in essence served as a rebranding tool for the island's tourism industry and gave the public an alternative center of focus from their existing reputation as a place of devastation to one with a thriving arts culture and strong community.

The negative response of a group of Puerto Ricans to Lin-Manuel and Hamilton shows that even when your intentions are good, your public can still be against you, and therefore knowing and respecting the experiences and values of that community is essential.

Despite all of the good intentions involved in bringing *Hamilton* to the island, the production was not without controversy. Originally, *Hamilton* was set to host its three-week run at the historic Teatro de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Luis Miranda's alma mater and the place the Miranda family considered to be the cultural heart of the island. However, after a year of planning by university administration, students and show producers, and the investment of \$1 million was spent on rebuilding the theater following Maria, it was announced on Dec. 21 that the production was being relocated to San Juan. (La Times) The decision for relocation was made in response to a letter from the university labor union warning him of the potential for a protest on campus in opposition to recent tuition hikes, stripping of employee benefits; claiming that the university should be dedicated more resources to improving the education system instead of hosting a musical. (Atlantic) To make things more complicated, the university had rules in place to prevent the Puerto Rican police from coming onto campus, which immediately presented safety and security threats. Luis Miranda then met with the union leaders to listen to their concerns. Despite the *Hamilton* team's support of the union's cause as well as their right to protest, they felt they ultimately had to act in the interest of their cast, crew and audience to ensure their safety, and relocate the show. On the issue of safety, Lin-Manuel said, "If there's the slightest chance something goes wrong, I cannot have that on my conscience. Whether it's a student or anybody, I can't have anybody getting hurt in my head." (LA Times) With just a few weeks until opening night, controversy continued as some Puerto Ricans continued to criticize Miranda and *Hamilton* for putting his efforts towards the arts when part of the island was still without proper infrastructure and financial stability, and some brought up political arguments against the show based in the tensions between the island and the United States. (Atlantic) Despite the controversy, the show moved forward, and as Lin and Luis Miranda continued to do press for the production, they were transparent yet stood by their reasonings for bringing the show to Puerto Rico as well as its relocation.

The protest and response of this case is reminiscent of the protests at the Jewish Museum in New York City after backlash against their controversial and offensive exhibit prompted the organization to rethink their communication strategy to show greater respect and consideration towards the concerns of the Jewish community. Lin-Manuel and his team took a similar

approach to the threat of protests surrounding the production, where they directly engaged with the university labor union and showed their respect for their movement by complying with their wishes and relocating the production. Adding another layer of respecting publics, the team's decision to prioritize the safety and security of everyone involved in the production shows Lin-Manuel's ability to respect one's publics and communities to the fullest extent possible.

Changing the venue weeks before opening night, already in the midst of controversy, highlights Miranda and his team's ability to respond quickly and appropriately to public concern.

The *Hamilton* team's response to all of the criticism that came with the production and its relocation allowed them to get on top of the discourse and control the narrative surrounding it. Just as the Cleveland Clinic hosted a news conference to answer concerns with transparency and well thought out responses, Lin's many press appearances and the post-opening night press conference show a willingness to accept criticism and take on challenging ethical issues.

Lin-Manuel's display of the Puerto Rican flag at the opening-night curtain call creates a powerful and inspiring visual that became directly linked to the cause.

At the opening-night curtain call, Lin-Manuel thanked his team and brought his father on stage before pulling a Puerto Rican flag out of his coat pocket, waving it passionately and igniting a roaring applause from both the audience and the cast. The image of Miranda proudly displaying his heritage in the name of advocacy is truly a powerful one, and that visual soon became synonymous with Miranda's relief initiative. Almost every news article discussing *Hamilton* in Puerto Rico used that image of Miranda and the flag to better convey the passion and love behind the production, inspiring readers and in turn generating support for the fund.



Hamilton in PR, as well as a case like Kentucky Fried Cruelty represents how visuals can bring new meaning and life into the story an organization is trying to tell. Accounts of relief aid and animal cruelty are just not as strong without powerful images to back them up, and it makes the narrative more life-like by forcing your audience to confront the issue head on.

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