

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

## **TV and Radio Marti After Fidel Castro** <sup>[1]</sup>

Miami, Fla. -- More than 70,000 celebrants are expected to pack Miami's Orange Bowl to mark Fidel Castro's departure, whenever that may come. TV/Radio Marti are at the ready to beam stories back to Cuba with expanded broadcasts.

The Orange Bowl blast, sanctioned by the City of Miami, will doubtless be mega-covered by domestic U.S. and international media, but there will be no cracking open of Piñatas, which will be officially banned from the Orange Bowl by the City.

Lots of partying can be expected elsewhere, especially throughout Miami's Little Havana neighborhoods along the miles of Calle Ocho (SW 8th Street) which runs through the center of town, with its sparkling nightclubs, Latin restaurants, and art galleries, all popular with locals and tourists.

Then what?

Do the American government's Cuba Broadcasting stations then fade-to-black, together with Castro's dramatically less-charismatic younger brother, Raul, now Cuba's leader, should he falter? Or, as Worldcasting has pondered in this series: should the Martis be turned loose to flex their muscles by extending their calling throughout Latin America, to reap a further return on investment in them by the U.S. government and its taxpayers over the past decades?

What are like-minded countries up to right now, so far as beaming long-form broadcast schedules to Latin America? The most active appear to come from Asia and Europe, according to Dr. Kim Andrew Elliott, the astute audience research analyst in the U.S. government's International Broadcasting Bureau.

Germany's Deutsche Welle from its Berlin headquarters has an ambitious Spanish-language service to Latin America, and so does China's CCTV, headquartered in far-off Beijing.

And as one might expect, Spain has a lively Spanish-language service for Latin America, Radio Television Espanola, from Madrid.

And so if one uses the real estate valuation of "location-location," Miami wins hands-down, as the undisputed U.S. gateway to Latin America.

As a New York Times article observed, referring to Miami's emerging persona, "Miami had largely ceased to be a city of the south. It had become a metropolis of the north, a magnet for people and capital from throughout Latin America. The influx of Cuban refugees had been superseded by waves of vibrant cosmopolitanism...."

But an authoritative source who wished to remain anonymous believes the Martis would be "a hard sell" in Latin America because of "some crude propaganda on TV Marti" such as "La Oficina de Jefe" (The Boss's Office), its weekly parody sitcom about Castro. Another take on

the program comes from David Adams, Latin American correspondent for the St. Petersburg (Florida) Times. He praises the series for having "turned Castro satire into an art." Adams notes that "Each sketch ends when the lights go out, a reference to the frequent power outrages which are the bane of everyday Cuban life."

Then from Washington, DC., as Worldcasting reported in this series, there is the present Voice of America's program service to Latin America, where most listening of VOA programs comes from placement of content on affiliate stations. According to veteran former Foreign Service officer Guy Farmer, who served in several senior positions abroad for the U.S. Information Agency, the model for such affiliate placement goes back farther in time than we suspected.

"We were doing large-scale local (program) placement in Venezuela in the 1970s, and in Colombia in the 1980s," Farmer recalls.

It could be fairly asked of those in Washington whether the model of yesteryear fits all sizes in today's Latin America, and how such local media placement of U.S. government programs is faring in authoritarian countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and other locales where news from the outside may not be welcome -- as in Cuba, for example. And Worldcasting must emphasize that it's not so much the number of affiliates that run programs or program excerpts from the U.S., but the power and reach of those stations, the time of broadcast, and finally authenticating actual placement.

Conversely, expressing his own views, Dr. Elliott tells Worldcasting that to be successful, a TV Marti for Latin America would require carriage by major satellite services. "Distribution would have to be via the Latin American versions of DirecTV or DISH.... If not, reception would only be via the big C-band dish, West Virginia style."

And so when the Orange Bowl festivities are a wrap, and the stadium grows dark and still, then what?

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