

# Marti's programming forces changes in Cuban broadcasts

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2,000 jamming stations, costing approximately \$1 billion annually.

Aside from the cost, Castro's vanity causes him to avoid full-scale jamming, which would affirm Marti's appeal. Marti, with 80 correspondents, costs just \$10 million annually, less than one advanced fighter plane. Marti is a magnificently cost-effective weapon.

Cubans are ravenous for news from Angola and Ethiopia, where 400,000 Cubans (half of them civilians) have served Soviet purposes. Castro's worship of Soviet technology caused a four-day stunned silence in the Cuban press after Chernobyl. Marti instantly broadcast not only the news, but a nuclear glossary, and interviews with exiled Cuban scientists about a nuclear plant Soviet technicians are building in Cuba.

Because Cuba is governed by "scientific socialism," there are, by defini-

tion, no crimes or other serious defects. However, since Marti has been broadcasting about developments in Cuba, Cuban broadcasts have been giving more attention to crimes and to problems like AIDS (which, until recently, Cuban authorities said did not exist there).

From Marti, Cubans learned of the massacre of dozens of young people when planes and gunboats sank a pleasure boat sailing toward freedom. Marti told Cubans about the attempted kidnapping of a Cuban defector by Cuban Embassy officials in Madrid. Marti has reported the shambles of Cuba's sugar production: Cuba is reduced to buying sugar in the world market. Then it sells that, for less than it paid for it, to East Bloc nations to pay for Soviet subsidies.

An especially popular program on Marti is "Family Bridge," on which Cubans and Americans call Marti on an (800) number and give personal messages that are beamed to Cuba. "Aunt

Maria's operation went well, and Jose is engaged." But even more popular than the broadcast of jazz, "Top 40" rock 'n' roll and baseball is a soap opera about "Esmerelda."

She — Esmerelda, that is — is one reason Cuban broadcasting is improving. Totalitarian regimes politicize everything and extinguish the freedom not to think about politics. The growth of Marti's audience for its non-political programming has forced Cuban broadcasting to lighten up. There is now more programming for the restless young, and more first-run movies in prime time.

This change is a reluctant concession to consumer sovereignty. Any acknowledgement, however small and surly, of the power and claims of popular desires subverts the central pillar of totalitarianism, the tenet that the masses should be utterly passive and plastic to the power of the state.

So the voices beamed from the studios in the building at the foot of Capitol Hill have produced in Cuba a small stirring, something like a crocus sprouting through a crack in concrete. And life, however frail, has a way of triumphing in time, even over stone.

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Will is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and a contributing editor for Newsweek magazine.

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