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The Spanish Town Crier: A Case Study of Radio Sol's Grassroots Programming in an Era of Spanish-Language Radio Consolidation

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ARTICLE

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Abstract

This study draws evidence from trends in Spanish-language radio proliferation and media consolidation to examine how the nation's fastest growing ethnic group is served by this key news and information medium.

Latinos establishing themselves in historically non-Latino urban areas are statistically likely to turn to radio for information. However, the quality of programming can vary significantly and, in many cases, is exclusively entertainment produced outside the region. Local programming has been threatened by growth and consolidation, which have led to large corporations holding most stations in urban markets. Networks that distribute canned programming to their outlets ignore listener's need for local news and information.

A case study of Seattle's Radio Sol KKMO-AM 1360 shows the essential role locally produced programming plays in one such emerging Latino urban area. Radio Sol is often the only comprehensive source for stories in which the Latino voice is heard. Locally produced content enfranchises listeners with information Spanish speakers need to access services and participate in democracy.

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Introduction

Against the backdrop of a divisive national immigration debate, three trends emerging in parallel have the potential to shape community building and democratic participation for Latinos, the nation's fastest growing immigrant group:

1) In the past 25 years, Spanish-language radio stations have proliferated by 1,000 percent (Schement, 1981; Arbitron, 2007).

2) The 1996 loosening of federal media ownership rules has permitted a few corporations to dominate Spanish-language broadcast markets, particularly in urban areas.

3) The consolidation of more stations in fewer hands has reduced local influence on programming at a time when Latinos are establishing new urban communities and relying on radio as a key source of news and information.

For example, broadcast giants such as Telemundo (owned by NBC/Sony) have cut local television news in some of the nation's largest markets, filling the gap with a single TV newscast out of Fort Worth, Texas (NAHJ, 2006). In radio, consolidation has allowed large broadcast groups to feed syndicated programming stripped of local content to stations across the country. Now that radio stations are no longer required to provide non-entertainment programming (Redd, 1991) and many do not have any local news (Fox, 1993). Some stations don't run local public service announcements (PSAs), which numerous psychology studies have shown to be effective in improving access to healthcare and spreading messages about nutrition, prenatal care and heart health (Humphries, Macus, Stewart, Oliva, 2004; Quinn, Hauser, Bell-Ellingson, Rodriguez, Frias, 2006; Alvarado, Balcazar, Huerta, 1999).

Federal Communication Commission (FCC) changes over the past three decades have prompted Latino community leaders and a former U.S. Secretary of Commerce to express concern about the decline in the diversity of radio programming (Saldivar, 2004; Mineta, 2000; FreePress, 2007).

This paper will examine these trends in contrast with a case study of Seattle's Radio Sol, Washington State's first 24-hour Spanish-language radio station. This station is significant because it is both representative of a national trend (a station that serves an emerging Latino market) and emblematic of a contrast to a national trend (a station that provides almost exclusively local content to a small, urban market share). The station considers itself the "Spanish town crier" for its new and growing Latino community.

This paper analyzes locally produced Spanish radio programming as a tool to mobilize the masses, to help urban Latinos build community and participate in democracy. While the scope of this study is limited to anecdotal analysis, the examples are worthy of examination under current conditions of rapid consolidation that restricts program diversity and at a crucial time in growth of Latino immigration and development of immigration policy.

This paper hypothesizes that several key FCC deregulation actions are moving the public airwaves away from serving the public good by providing access to essential

information while continuing to serve advertisers who wish to reach that public's wallets. Further, as radio newsrooms are being shuttered, the Spanish-speaking populations that depend almost entirely on radio broadcasts as their key source of information are being disenfranchised by a lack of access of local news.

This research builds on the growth and consolidation trends examined by Paredes in 2003, who wrote that the rapid growth and consolidation of Spanish-language radio could threaten "local programming and content diversity" and was targeting a "Latin pot of gold" rather than using the public airwaves to inform (Paredes, 2003 p. 1) . Paredes' study was completed prior to Univision's merger with Hispanic Broadcasting Corporation. This study shows that many concerns Paredes raised about consolidations' effect on content have since come to fruition.

This study builds on Paredes' research into those trends, adding more recent evidence. Further, this research includes a case study of a 5-year-old Spanish-language radio station serving a small but growing Latino population in a large city. This study hypothesizes that the type of locally generated programming threatened by growth and consolidation plays an essential role in building community and providing key news and information in emerging urban areas.

For the purposes of this paper, Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably. Hispanic is the U.S. Census term. Latino is the term preferred by the author.

Latino Radio Culture

Latinos in the Pacific Northwest rely on radio as a trustworthy information source (Fisher, Marcoux, Miller, Sánchez, Ramirez Cunningham, 2004). Fifty-eight percent of Latinos get news by radio, as opposed to 19 percent of the overall U.S. population that gets news via radio. Fifty-six percent of foreign-born U.S. Latinos get all their news from Spanish-language radio, a larger percentage than any other medium (Suro, 2004). "Even as the English-language media purveys values and cultural expressions drawn primarily from the experience of the native born, the Spanish-language media reflects the immigrant experience and reinforces ties to the home country" (Suro, 2004 p. 1).

New immigrants rely on radio because it is free, widely accessible and familiar. Latinos are twice as likely to listen to native-language media than are Asian or Middle Eastern immigrants to the United States (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004). Most Latinos listen to Spanish radio at work, meaning they can consume media while doing other things (Arbitron, 2006). Also, in that context radio is passive and pervasive; Spanish speakers do not have to seek out radio at specific locations. Spanish Radio does not present literacy or language barriers, if familiar and pervasive. Radio "…tells Hispanics they are not alone…" (O'Guinn, Meyer, 1983, p. 10).

In 1983, when advertising professor Dr. Thomas O'Guinn and communications professor Dr. Timothy Meyer published, "Segmenting the Market: The Use of Spanish-Language Radio," they found a lack of research on Spanish-language media. Twenty-four years later, subsequent research has confirmed many of O'Guinn and Meyer's hypotheses about what was then a fledgling medium.

Research shows that Latinos fluent in English still depend on Spanish-language media for international news from Latin America and about local news of importance to the Hispanic community (Suro, 2004). Further evidence for the importance of radio is the

comparatively slow growth of Spanish-language daily newspapers, from seven in 1970 to 35 in 2002 (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2002). Spanish-language newspapers grew by 400 percent in 32 years while radio grew by 1,000 percent in 25 years.

Most of Seattle's Latino immigrants did not arrive in Seattle until 1990 or later and have come from Central American nations (Census, 2000) with strong traditions of radio as a tool for mobilizing the masses. In 1990, an indigenous group in Guatemala founded a Mayan-language radio program on Radio Nuevo Mundo that would begin at 4 a.m., the time when many rural workers were awakening to begin working in the fields. The program was groundbreaking in that it targeted the minority language *campesinos* (rural farmworkers) in a way that had not been done in that country for 50 years (Rockwell, 2001).

Radio's power can be seen in the fact that during Guatemala's guerilla war, army troops targeted radio stations broadcasting in Mayan dialects. Soldiers killed and arrested employees and destroyed their broadcasting equipment (Rockwell, 2001). Similarly, in Mexico in the 1980s, "feisty talk-radio shows came to dominate the airwaves in Mexico's larger cities" and encouraged the development of a more independent media in a country used to heavy-handed censorship and where all news sounded the same (Lawson, 2002, p. 127).

At that same time in California, Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farmworkers of America, turned to the power of radio for informing and mobilizing a Spanish-speaking community that was largely rural, undereducated, poor and working in the agriculture industry. In the 1980s, Huerta founded KUFW, Radio Campesina, as a means of disseminating education and information—both about access to services and political activism—to California's migrant workers and new immigrants.

Radio Campesina now owns nine stations along the West Coast. The stations hold charity drives, urge smoking cessation, provide information about farmworker rights and where to enroll children in early childhood development programs (http://www.campesina.com, 2007). A 2004 study by the Pew Hispanic Center found:

> "… an overwhelming majority of all Latinos (78%) say that the Spanish-language media is very important to the economic and political development of the Hispanic population. This view of Spanish media as a valuable ethnic institution is shared by a majority (61%) of Latinos who get all their news in English. These responses suggest that the Spanish-language media play an esteemed role as spokesmen for the Latino population and that they have a significant influence in the formation of Hispanic identities. The significance of the Spanish-language media as a social and cultural institution is magnified by the widespread concern expressed by 44% of all Latinos that the English-language media contributes to a negative image of the Hispanic population in the United States" (Suro, p. 2).

Latinos Establish Communities in New Urban Areas

Southern California and the Southwest have long-established Latino communities, many rooted to the period when they were Mexican territory. The population of Los Angeles is more than half Latino.

In Seattle, Spanish speakers comprise about 5 percent of the majority Anglo population. Most of the city's immigrants are Asian (City of Seattle, 2007). Most of Washington's Hispanic population is concentrated in four rural counties with agriculturally based economies. In 2004, Yakima, Grant, Franklin and Adams counties had populations between 35 and 54 percent Hispanic. The number of Latinos in those four counties was 169,137. By contrast the total number of Latinos in King County, population 1.73 million and home to Seattle, was 117,890.

In the rural agricultural belt, Hispanic communities are large, concentrated and longer established (U.S. Census, 1990). In close-knit communities where immigrants live in proximity to one another, Spanish speakers can communicate more readily about where to find resources, jobs, healthcare and other information. Eastern Washington Latino communities are served mostly by small radio stations with blocks of Spanish programming, including one Radio Campesina station.

In urban Seattle, the Hispanic community is dispersed in small pockets or individually isolated (U.S. Census, 2000). Spanish speakers are less likely to come into contact with other Spanish speakers during the course of their everyday business.

> "…language is a major barrier for immigrant families, especially as most important documents ranging from housing to education are written in English. Thus, immigrants must find an interpreter and, as we were told, the costs often outweigh the benefits of seeking information such that immigrants do not ask for help or they just wait until someone helpful comes along. Much of what is communicated to this population by the radio is in their native language; thus, the radio is often a source of defining where immigrants will go either to secure further information or find an interpreter" (Fisher, Marcoux, Miller, Sánchez, Ramirez Cunningham, 2004).

In a community with a tiny Spanish-speaking population it is unlikely "someone helpful" will appear. This underscores the importance of local programming in an area where not only is the Latino population newly established, it is also newly urban.

A Few Hands Hold Many Stations

Nationally, Spanish radio grew from 67 Spanish-language stations in 1980 to 715 in 2005 (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006). Its pervasiveness in Spanish-speaking homes and workplaces makes it an essential way to deliver news and information alongside the music formats popular with listeners.

One media ownership group dominates Spanish broadcasting: Univision, whose slogan is "One vision, one language, one network." In 2003, when Univision purchased Hispanic Broadcasting Corp.'s 65 radio stations in 17 of the top 25 U.S. Hispanic markets, Univision CEO A. Jerrold Perenchio said, "Univision's entry into the $20 billion radio industry presents tremendous opportunities for our employees, advertisers and shareholders. Approximately 60 percent of all national advertisers do not yet advertise in Spanish. We expect that Univision's new ability to offer advertisers the brand-building power of television in combination with the promotional power of radio will accelerate their development of Spanish-language marketing campaigns" (Univision, 2003). He did not address programming or local news and information.

Perenchio, who had purchased the corporation from Hallmark Cards in 1992, sold Univision in 2007 to Saban Capital Group, named after billionaire media investor Haim Saban and which includes four private equity firms: Madison Dearborn Partners, Providence Equity Partners, Texas Pacific Group and Thomas H. Lee Partners. Thomas H. Lee Partners has stakes in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Warner Music (Sorkin, 2006; State of the News Media, 2007). Lee is an owner in the nation's largest radio ownership group, Clear Channel Communications. At the time this research was conducted, in spring 2007, Clear Channel Radio (a division of Clear Channel Communications) owned 1,184 radio stations and was viewed as the poster child for consolidation. Scant media attention has been paid, however, to the market penetration of Univision and #2 Telemundo, which dominate the landscape of Latino broadcasting. Univision's market domination makes the corporation attractive to major national advertisers. And competition Telemundo is not far behind.

In 2006, NBC decided to terminate all Telemundo news programs in large markets: Houston (4), Dallas (6), San Antonio, Texas (7), San Jose, Calif. (8) and Phoenix (9), and replace them with "hubbed out" newscasts from Fort Worth (NAHJ, 2007).

A relaxation of rules under the Telecommunications Act of 1996 has led to mass consolidations as the market has grown. Until the 1980s, FCC rules prohibited companies from owning more than one radio station in the same service (AM or FM) in a market and prohibited a company from owning both a television station and a radio station in the same market. The 1996 act put ownership on a sliding scale relative to market size. In a large, urban market with between 30 and 44 stations, one company may own up to seven commercial radio stations, not more than four of which are in the same service (AM or FM); in a radio market with 45 or more radio stations, a company may own up to eight commercial stations, not more than five of which are in the same service (FCC, 1996).

Between 1996 and 2002, there was a 5.4 percent increase in the number of commercial stations, but the number of radio owners declined by 34 percent. Also, the number of radio stations in metro markets decreased by about three owners per market (Williams, 2002). A report issued by the Department of Commerce in 2000 expressed concern about mass consolidations and loss of independent stations.

> "… to prevent further diminution of competition and diversity in the radio industry. It appears that while there may have been a number of salutary effects flowing from the consolidation that has taken place since 1996, largely in financial strength and enhanced efficiencies, it cannot be

> said that consolidation has enhanced competition or diversity, and indeed, may be having the opposite effect. There currently are hundreds of fewer licenses than there were four years ago and, in many communities, far fewer radio licensees compete against each other" (FCC, 2000).

In February 2007, the FCC sanctioned Univision, which reaches 99 percent of Spanish-speaking homes, with a record $24 million fine for not providing the requisite three hours per week of educational programming. The fine was nearly triple the previous highest fine of $9 million. The network had been classifying television "soap operas," or *telenovelas* as children's programming, thus failing to meet its required minimum mandate of three hours per week of educational programming. The FCC found that the 24 of the network's television stations had failed to provide the required amount of children's programming for 116 weeks between 2004 and 2006. (Ahrens, 2007).
Telemundo and Univision dominate Spanish-language radio as well.

Univision owns 62 television stations under Univision or TeleFutura (a cable network with 5.9 million subscribers), three music labels and 72 Spanish-language radio stations in the United States (Ahrens, 2007). The record fine, the number of broadcast outlets involved and the time period of the violations demonstrate a lack of regular FCC monitoring for compliance with content rules. At a time when pop star Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" made headlines for weeks, Univision flew under the radar screen for two years while preschoolers at a critical learning phase were expected to watch romantic melodrama instead of learning letters with Big Bird.

While this example stems from television, it shows the potential widespread damage when there is only one message being disseminated. This study further examines whether the same pattern applies to local radio. Further study is needed to determine whether dominant forces in Spanish-language broadcasting are, at minimum, abiding by the rules. The FCC in 2006 commissioned a study by researcher Tasneem Chipty using station-level data to study ownership structure's effects on radio programming and audience (FCC, 2006). The report has not yet been published but will provide useful data for further analysis.

Examples of negative effects caused by consolidation of Spanish-language radio abound, however, still being taken at this time by the Federal Communications Commission. When Delia Saldivar, stations manager at bilingual radio station KHDC in Salinas, Calif., spoke before the FCC in 2004, she addressed the decline in programming by stations acquired by Univision. Saldivar spoke strongly saying consolidation harmed those attempting to establish themselves in the United States and failed to provide "reliable and culturally competent information."

> "Consequently, as the need for reliable information grows, so has the consolidation of the media outlets. This consolidation includes Latino Spanish-language services such as the purchase of Hispanic Broadcasting Corporation (HBC) by Univision last year and the acquisition of Telemundo (the 2nd largest Spanish-language TV network) by NBC. The Spanish language corporate media offers less information to our communities, less cultural programming,

> and virtually no local informational programming. The corporate Spanish radio industry is increasing its broadcast of its own version of 'shock radio' and liberally broadcasts music that glamorizes drugs and violence to increase their ratings. Unfortunately, in many markets, especially urban California markets; there is no Spanish language public radio service to provide an intelligent alternative for listeners" (FCC, 2004).

Consolidation Ends Local News Broadcasts

Easing station ownership rules creates economic efficiency for large corporations to purchase syndicated programming in bulk and distribute it across stations. "Programming" can become a function of someone monitoring a computer screen rather than live, on-air interaction with the audience. As with NBC's decision to cut local Telemundo television newscasts, news and information skew national rather than local.

Even stations that are primarily music format commonly feature program hosts who mention current events and give information, such as where to register to vote. At stations that depend entirely on syndicated programming, the communication is one way. There is no invitation to participate in the conversation.

The FCC manages the airwaves to ensure the public interest is being served. What is cheapest is not often what best serves the public interest. Just as newspapers attract readers and boost circulation (and thereby attract advertisers eager to reach readers) by being the only source of information about the activities of the local city council, the accident on Main Street or the hiring of the new superintendent of schools; radio stations boost listener ratings (and thereby attract advertisers eager to reach listeners) by providing content that is both entertaining and useful. Competition among radio stations spurs them to serve their listeners. When that competition disappears, so does the incentive to act in the public's best interest.

Between 1990 and 1992, more than 300 commercial radio stations dropped their news operations entirely. Before the deregulation of 1981, every radio station carried news (Fox, 2003). Now, if a big news story breaks, the station may not have reporters to cover it. Major networks, which often rely on regional affiliates to cover big, breaking news in a particular area, now have nobody on site to send to the story (Fox, 1993, p. 9).

The Deregulation of Radio policy of 1981 lifted a previous requirement that AM radio stations devote 8 percent of airtime to non-entertainment programming, including public affairs, news, religious programming and public service announcements (PSAs) (Fox, 1992). PSAs call attention to societal problems (e.g. smoking, substance abuse) or promote resources and services (e. g. where to get free mammograms or preschool). The 1981 regulations instructed radio stations to inform their listeners of issues, but set no standards or definitions. For many radio stations, eliminating this rule meant the ability to devote unlimited airtime to advertisers (Redd, 1991).

A 1992 article in Columbia Journalism Review stated, "Deregulation left commercial radio news gasping for air. In 1981, the Federal Communications Commission lifted the requirement that stations broadcast non-entertainment programming—otherwise known as news and public affairs. Since local news is

expensive to produce and listeners to all-music stations seldom demand more than headlines, that change helped slowly strangle local radio reporting" (Fox, 1992, p. 9).

Loss of local PSAs can hurt emerging Latino communities. Social service agencies depend on radio to get the word out to potential clients and may otherwise have trouble reaching those they serve (Redd, 1991). Numerous studies have shown such announcements on Spanish-language radio to yield positive results. A 2004 study using Spanish-language radio to direct Los Angeles residents to self-help groups saw the number of Spanish-language calls about self-help groups increased 821 percent in the sixth months after the study (Humphries, Macus, Stewart, Oliva, 2004).

Stations owned by corporations thousands of miles away and fed programming out of Los Angeles may chose to run local PSAs, but the law no longer requires them to. Former United States Secretary of Commerce Norman Mineta expressed concern in the introduction to a 2002 National Telecommunications and Information Administration report in response to 1996 regulation changes:

> "This changing landscape poses new challenges and opportunities for broadcasters and our Nation. As we forge new paths, we must hold fast to the values of diversity and localism that have long served our Nation well. For almost a century, we have promoted diversity of independent editorial viewpoints and guarded against undue media concentration. We have labored to prevent the potential monopolization of the marketplace of ideas, to protect the needs of local communities, and to promote the free exchange of diverse viewpoints and information" (Mineta, 2000).

Case study of Radio Sol: The Medium That Can Mobilize the Masses

Located in the heart of downtown Seattle in a modern high-rise building, Radio Sol occupies one state-of-the-art glassed-in booth among the three production rooms, two control rooms and two studios on the 15th floor in the Salem Communications office. Five of the six AM stations under the Salem roof provide politically and socially conservative, Christian-oriented news and talk-show programming. Radio Sol, KKMO 1360 AM, has no religious content or political affiliation. The Salem office is a typical maze of tidy gray cubicles for sales and support staff and the manager's offices overlook Elliot Bay and the upscale downtown shopping district. The atmosphere is formal and corporate. Most of the staff is Anglo. Spending time on-site at Radio Sol and conducting interviews with its on-air host, staff and general manager provided essential input for this study.

Salem Communications, the nation's seventh largest radio station ownership group, owns 106 stations, 23 of them news, one of them Spanish. By contrast, Univision, the twelfth biggest radio-station ownership group in the country owns 72 stations, all of them Spanish-language entertainment and none of them news; and Entravision, ranked seventeenth, owns 52, all of them Spanish-language music and none of them news (State of the News Media, 2007).

Salem Communications launched Radio Sol in January 2002, creating Washington State's first 24-hour Spanish-language radio station. Unlike other Spanish-language radio stations serving urban areas with small Latino populations, Radio Sol featured local talk, news and personalities. By 2005, Seattle had two more Spanish-language radio stations, one AM and one FM, both owned by Bustos Media of California and both playing exclusively syndicated programming produced in California (Saul, 2006).

Radio Sol's format is primarily Mexican regional music. The station has three hours of syndicated programming, which General Manager Joe Gonzalez added in January 2007 because he said he wanted the station to feel more "widespread," but the effect was a drop in ratings. During its syndicated programming, call-in show host Jaime Mendez does traffic, weather and news updates. He then has his morning call-in show. From noon to 3 p.m. local radio personality Adriana Gonzales' show features music, live talk, news, and entertainment news. The rest of the day, local disc jockeys interject between songs to comment about the issues of the day, be they trivial, humorous or serious. There is a local flavor and connection to Seattle.

This case study hypothesized that, as a station with local programming, Radio Sol would 1) cover certain issues in greater depth than the Anglo news media; 2) frame its content to include, rather than excluding or treating Latinos as "other;" and 3) show instances in which locally accessible programming invited two-way communication that would allow people to participate in events and connect them with essential information and services, thus helping build a sense of enfranchisement and two-way communication.

Gonzalez said local programming is more expensive to provide than syndicated material, but he sees the local approach as both a market niche and a service. "Stations that are just entertainment don't serve…There has to be components relative to the issues in the Spanish community and that link to our broader community" (Joe Gonzalez, personal interview, March 2, 2007). Gonzalez sees radio as a way to serve the public and added that if service radio is done right, it will also be profitable, as he says Radio Sol is. Gonzalez, who has experience working in radio in Eastern Washington where nearly half the population is Latino, said Seattle Latinos are more isolated and therefore more difficult to mobilize (Joe Gonzalez, personal communication, March 2, 2007).

"While primarily a musical format broadcasting regional Mexican, Gonzalez said the station lays claim to being 'the Spanish town crier for all Hispanics'… We live where we do our business…We have local talent living in the community" (Saul, 2006, p. f1).

Since Radio Sol hit the airwaves five years ago, the station's disc jockeys and talk-show hosts have become community celebrities. "I used to go to a lot of events, fairs, booths, festivals," talk-show host Jaime Mendez said. "People would just come up to me and hug me" (Mendez, personal communication, March 2, 2007). Radio Sol has built connections within the community by co-sponsoring events to inform local Latinos about jobs in Spanish broadcasting, participating in citywide diversity celebrations and working with Seattle Central Community College's Mano a Mano, a student organization dedicated to increasing access to higher education for Latino students. Mendez became an accessible community icon—someone respected, recognized and beloved (Megan Muldary, personal interview, March 2, 2007).

Seattle's Spanish speakers use the show as a way to talk about local politics, election issues, immigration issues and to find help with healthcare, employment, shelter

and legal problems. During a March 2, 2007 show with Mendez, "La Voz de Washington," a woman who feared being deported to the country where she had fled an abusive husband called in. The switchboard lit up with individuals and agency workers giving advice not only to the caller but to anyone living with domestic violence. Callers provided phone numbers for services where undocumented immigrants living in domestic violence situations could go for help without threat of being arrested.

Mendez said his show is also often the only outlet for news essential to the lives of many of Seattle's Latino immigrants. On February 14, 2007, an immigration raid on a United Parcel Service warehouse in Auburn, Wash. sent 51 people, including a nursing mother of a 4-month-old baby to a federal detention facility. The city's largest newspaper, *The Seattle Times* as well as major local television and radio stations did not cover the raid. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* newspaper was the only Anglo media outlet to cover the raid. The *P-I* ran a short item that quoted an immigration agent and a spokeswoman from the company under investigation. There was one sentence about those arrested: "The arrested workers are being held at an immigration detention facility in Tacoma pending further proceedings." (McNerthney, 2007, p. B1).

In the heat of the immigration raid, Mendez was piecing together reports by family members of people being arrested and giving accounts of the event nearly in real time as people called in to Radio Sol via cell phone. Over the next hours and days, churches, lawyers and concerned citizens were raising funds to help the mother, whose unweaned child would not take a bottle and began to suffer from malnutrition while his mother developed a lactation-related infection because she could not feed her child (Jaime Mendez, personal interview, March 2, 2007).

"If not for Radio Sol, people would not have known about this," Mendez said in a personal interview. Radio Sol was the only outlet for the families and friends of the 51 UPS Supply Store workers to get detailed information about the raid, how to contact lawyers, visit their loved ones in detention and navigate the legal process.

Similarly, most Anglo coverage of the biggest Latino event in the city's history, the spring 2006 marches for immigration rights, was geared toward providing information for people not involved in the events. In the weeks before the big May 1 "Day Without An Immigrant" boycott and rally for immigrant rights, a Seattle march drew between 20,000 and 30,000 people. On the day of Seattle's biggest rally, the *Post-Intelligencer* ran an article showing people where to go to avoid the "traffic snarls" caused by protestors but did not give information for people wanting to participate in the march ("Downtown Protest Today," 2006, p. B1). Further study into the Anglo framing of Latinos as "others" rather than part of the readership being addressed in regard to this major national news event is needed.

The protest conversation at Radio Sol had been going on for weeks, with Mendez fielding calls about legal rights, taking questions about fear of deportation, airing views on the wall proposed for the Mexican border and on President George Bush's proposal to make illegal immigration a felony (Jaime Mendez, personal interview, March 2, 2007).

The Seattle Times front-page headline was, "Stunning turnout credited to word-of-mouth network." The story credited churches and Spanish-language radio with spreading the word about the large march (Turnbull, 2006, p. A1). Radio Sol Station Manager Joe Gonzalez credited his station with boosting the turnout. "We think when the Hispanic community needs news and information, they turn to us," Gonzalez said (Saul, 2006, p.

F1). Gonzalez said the station did not help organize the immigration rallies, but disseminated information about them.

Host Mendez has seen the impact of the airwaves on other occasions when listeners have responded to calls for action. Following the 2005 tsunami in Southeast Asia, Mendez invited listeners to contribute to the victims. Dozens of Latinos showed up with donations to help with relief efforts (Lindblom, 2005, p. B1). Mendez said he also uses his show to help protect those new to the area from being victimized by scam artists who prey on immigrants. Callers to his show have ended up buying cars later to find out they are being charged 29 percent interest. Other callers help those people find legal services to gain recourse (Jaime Mendez, personal interview, March 2, 2007).

Conclusion

Using Seattle's Radio Sol as a representative example of growth and consolidation trends in Spanish-language radio, this study questioned whether local programming in a traditionally non-Latino urban market covered issues differently than (or ignored by) the Anglo media and whether interactivity such as call-in shows has helped to connect people to services and mobilize them to act. At a time when mass consolidation is leaving many urban markets with only syndicated Spanish-language radio programming, Radio Sol has shown itself to be the only immediate and readily accessible source of news and information on key issues in the Seattle Latino community.

Anecdotal evidence as seen in the record-breaking turnouts at spring 2006 immigration rights rallies, local Latinos pulling together to provide relief for tsunami victims in Southeast Asia, and the daily volume and subject matter of calls to the station from people seeking information about legal issues, job searches and social services, shows that Radio Sol is helping build a sense of community among Seattle's Latinos.

Research cannot prove that the hours of call-in talk-show programming on Radio Sol in the days and weeks leading up the event inspired more marchers than might have participated absent that communication link. However, Radio Sol was the only Spanish-language outlet for Seattleites to discuss the event—and they embraced the opportunity (Jaime Mendez, personal interview, March 2, 2007).

This should not be construed as an argument that only Spanish-language media should cover issues important to the Latino community. The study of effects of media consolidation both on radio audience and programming deserves further examination. As the nation's largest radio ownership group Clear Channel changes hands and considers converting some of its stations to Spanish-language broadcast, there is ample room for continued examination. When published, the studies commissioned by the FCC in 2006 to evaluate the effects of media consolidation on both programming and audience should provide detailed data for further research.

As more stations convert to Spanish formats, listeners are best served by locally produced programming. While more expensive, it is an essential way to inform and engage urban Latinos. For those isolated in a big city, locally produced Spanish radio can help replace that helpful person they hope to run into to provide information. It can be the Spanish town crier.

Ideas for future research:

When this research was conducted in spring 2007, the economy had not yet embarked on the downslide that was to hit the following year. As of fall 2008, Univision's profit declines are making news in The New York Times business section ("Red Flags Fly After Big Buyouts, 2008, B1). A study of how Spanish-language radio stations are faring under this economic duress and an examination of whether news programs are continuing to be cut as stations try to save money would further illuminate this research and be a deeper test of the hypothesis that consolidation takes essential airwaves away from serving Spanish speakers' need for essential news and information.

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