

Puerto Rico



New Service

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For the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico

CONFIDENTIAL

December 15, 1960

TO: GUSTAVO AGRAIT (thru MS)

This is in answer to your suggestion that I send you a memo about Puerto Rico's stance in Latin America and what public relations action might be indicated.

The Present Situation

During the last year, I have queried as many Americans and non-Americans as possible returning from Latin America regarding both the shift in attitude toward the United States in general, and to Puerto Rico in particular. I have also talked privately to USIA officials on this score. And I find considerable unanimity of opinion, none of it very surprising, but nonetheless important.

It adds up to this:

1) The "image" of the United States has been deteriorating rapidly in most Latin American countries, particularly among the heretofore inert masses of the people.

2) U.S. propaganda, depending on the country, is rated by most observers as ranging from poor to laughable. USIA's staff in Latin American countries is heavily weighted by persons with poor or inexistent Spanish (or Portuguese), little feel for the country or people, and very ragged professional qualifications to boot.

3) Particularly, they know little or nothing about Puerto Rico, and are rarely competent to explain its relation to the U.S., its unique government, its economic development, its international programs, or its cultural upsurge.

4) Even if they were conversant with these facts, they are in an uncomfortable position to expound them: they would sound somewhat (however unjustly) as the Russians do when they extoll how happy the Poles are.

5) Cuban and Communist propaganda have increasingly focussed on Puerto Rico as a "slave state" of oppressed Latins yearning for liberation from their Yankee masters. This propaganda is heavy, increasing in intensity, penetration, and effectiveness.

6) The "image" of Puerto Rico is very garbled. In some countries, the Ponce massacre is still news; in others reputable papers treat as gospel stories about "the U.S." sterilizing Puerto Rican women; in many, Puerto Rico is considered a "stooge" (unhappy word) of the U.S. There is some spotty knowledge about Puerto Rico's economic development, but too often dismissed as a result of the U.S. "pouring in dollars". About its real political relation with the U.S., only the haziest notion. In sum, not a happy picture, and one which through ignorance and misinformation tends to strongly depreciate Puerto Rico and to prompt Latinos to consider it with a certain amount of contempt.

### Significance

A distorted picture of Puerto Rico adds up to two things for Puerto Rico itself.

1) It is very vexing to Puerto Rican pride. Puerto Ricans have a right to be proud of what they have done in recent years, and - only humanly - think other people should know and recognize its accomplishments.

2) To the degree that other Latins deprecate Puerto Rico and its accomplishments, Puerto Rico's leverage in the U.S. and Washington will eventually suffer. There has been considerable hope created in the U.S. that Puerto Rico could play a role of interpreting the U.S. to Latinos and vice versa. To visualize Puerto Rico in such a role confers prestige on Puerto Rico which can only favorably affect all its relations with the Federal government.

But if people in the U.S. come to feel that Latins themselves are contemptuous of any "honest broker" role by Puerto Rico, U.S. hopes to this effect would be sharply downgraded, and Puerto Rico's prestige and political leverage would suffer accordingly.

Therefore, as a matter of Puerto Rican self-interest, it seems to me to be highly desirable to explore how it can improve its "image" in Latin America, and make its situation and accomplishments fairly and favorably known.

### How This Can be Done

Puerto Rico already has very considerable means at its disposal for tackling this job. Among government agencies themselves

and through PRNS, it has wide means of generating news, photos, and other informational devices. At present, all this is directed either locally in Puerto Rico or to the United States. Yet it would be quite simple and inexpensive to adapt part of this informational flow to Latin American outlets, and systematically direct some of it in this direction.

No very complex or expensive organization would be required, A small staff of persons sensitive to and knowledgeable about Latin America would be needed. They need not originate any material. Rather they would scan that emanating from government agencies, PRNS, Puerto Rican newspapers, and decide which would be of greatest interest to Latin outlets. They would then adapt the material accordingly, using public relations standards.

At the beginning, material would be directed largely to print media - primarily newspapers. It should be mailed directly from San Juan, and its source clearly identified. Eventually, radio could be tackled (it is the prime medium for reaching the masses of people in Latin America, as you know.) Tapes or inexpensive records, possibly consisting of music plus information, could then be circulated among the numerous radio stations in Latin America.

This program should obviously be closely coordinated with the Puerto Rican State Department's efforts in Latin America. Its contents should also be known to USIA. But its prime requisite would be a small, able staff of persons sensitive to the challenge that this represents to Puerto Rico and to the stakes in the ideological battle now being waged in Latin America.

On both counts, I am convinced that the matter is of importance, and growing importance.

✓ Budgetwise, I believe that initially the job could be gotten underway modestly for around \$25,000 annually -- of which some \$15,000 would be for salaries, and the balance for mimeo and distribution costs.

  
SCOTT F. RUNKLE

SFR/m