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***Stop Pissing on Us!* Trickle-Down Progressivism and New York's Latino Community**

By Angelo Falcón (February, 9, 2015)

"If you feed the horse enough oats, some will
pass through to the road for the sparrows."

--- John Kenneth Galbraith

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When I was a kid a long, long time ago, I was always delighted when the Superman comics featured excursions into Bizarro World, where everything was the opposite of things on Earth. In the Latino community, the Democratic Party has persuasively made the case for the failure of trickle-down economics since the days of the Reagan Administration. This was the approach of the Koch, Giuliani and Bloomberg Administrations in New York City in dealing with Latinos and other communities of color. With the election of Bill de Blasio as NYC Mayor in 2013, we were promised a new era of progressive policies. The adoption of greatly expanded pre-K and after school programs, paid sick leave, immigrant-friendly policies, mandatory affordable inclusionary zoning, introducing a living wage in some jobs and other initiatives, Mayor de Blasio appears to be largely keeping his campaign promises. With his election, the hope was that the Latino community would finally have a seat at the table, especially with the first Puerto Rican and person of color now being Council Speaker. Instead, Latinos in the city feel that they currently inhabit a political bizarro world where their expectations have been turned upside down.



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To their dismay, Latino community leaders found that Mayor de Blasio was continuing the practice of the Bloomberg, Giuliani and Koch Administrations of excluding the Latino community from meaningful participation in city government. Despite being 29 percent of the city population, at last count Latinos made up only 11 percent of de Blasio's appointments, making this the most underrepresented group in his Administration. On November 17th last year, over 200 Latino protestors showed up on the steps of City Hall to raise their concerns, many shouting "one term mayor!" in frustration at not being heard by an Administration that received 87 percent of the Latino vote just the year before. It's as if the man they helped elect all of a sudden turned into Bizarro-de Blasio!

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Supporters of the Mayor, which includes the 11-member mediocre Latino delegation in the City Council, argue that these concerns are unwarranted because the Mayor's progressive policies will in the end benefit the Latino

community automatically by trickling down on them. In addition, they point out, as a progressive he is committed to diversity in his Administration. They argue that all that the public criticisms of the Mayor's exclusion of Latinos from his Administration will do is help derail his progressive agenda. Latino concerns about remaining outsiders in city government after two decades of the same practice by Giuliani and Bloomberg need, apparently, to be sacrificed for the greater good that will ultimately benefit their community anyway. Talk about Bizarro-logic!

This is a phenomenon I will refer to as "trickle-down progressivism." To paraphrase John Kenneth Galbraith, he might characterize it today as, "If you feed the Central Park horses enough organic oats, some will pass through to the streets for the pajaritos." An important component of modern day progressivism is the role of civic participation, especially by the historically excluded. A recurring sentiment in the community is that Latinos need to be at the table, not on the menu. The de Blasio Administration seems comfortable with playing a paternalistic role with Latinos, giving the impression that their "progressive" initiatives will eventually "trickle-down" to them.

The "bizarre-ness" of the de Blasio practice of Latino exclusion was highlighted by a recent panel discussion his office sponsored this year on January 23rd. The topic was "One City Rising Together: The Role of Inclusive Leadership in Good Government" that had a disproportionate of Latinos in the program despite Latinos being disproportionately excluded from the de Blasio Administration. At this session, they celebrated the Administration's diversity and ignored the concerns of Latinos about being marginalized from the city's leadership. It was more of a dog and pony show than a serious discussion of the diversity of the de Blasio Administration's leadership. And to demonstrate the importance of the topic, the Mayor didn't even drop by this event of his to say hello.

During the Mayor's State of the City Address last week, except for his few 48 words in Spanish talking about the risks of the disappearance of the city's many opportunities it has offered new immigrants like his grandmother, he didn't make any specific reference in the more than 5,000-word speech to the city's racial-ethnic diversity and disparities. Although a product of the Dinkins Administration, de Blasio ignored the "gorgeous mosaic" imagery. The Latino experience in New York City, spanning more than a century, would indicate that those opportunities of the past that he was referring to were not available to all New Yorkers. His folksy reference to his family history, while touching, simply perpetuates a myth of New York as historically an open opportunity city for all. It was a case of Bizarro-history.

The Mayor's focus on housing affordability in his State of the City, while generally well-received in the Latino community, also raised many questions about the details in how it would "trickle-down" to Latinos. There are questions about whether or not the Mayor was presenting a defense of gentrification that has been displacing the longtime residents of Latino neighborhoods. There is also the concern with the definition of "affordability" for a community with as high a poverty rate and low-income level of the Latino population. Some have been arguing for a program specifically aimed at creating low-income housing rather than the amorphous "affordable" housing that appears to be beyond Latino affordability. Will the Latino community be part of the process of developing these housing policies or are

Latinos expected simply to be the passive "beneficiaries" of de Blasio's largesse in this area?

Latino community criticism of the de Blasio's Administration's marginalization of their role in the making and implementation of policies is not a criticism of those policies in general, but rather, specifically of the Mayor's Latino blindness. How can he talk about the need to address the problem of a "tale of two cities" when he excludes close to a third of the city's population from full participation in arriving at solutions? A function of a progressive administration should be, one would think, to empower those communities that have been historically marginalized and not simply to reinforce that marginalization. The exclusion of Latinos from a significant role in the leadership of New York City government over the last two decades under Giuliani and Bloomberg has had profound negative political, policy and economic consequences for this community. The expectation with de Blasio's election in 2013 was that this problem would receive some priority and not that the Latino community would have to settle for some warmed over "trickle-down progressivism" that in the end will result in being showered with political urine and little more. This whole thing is, well, pretty bizarro.

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