Falcón, Angelo
Reseña de "One Nation, One Standard: An Ex-Liberal on How Hispanics Can Succeed Just Like Other Immigrant Groups" de Herman Badillo
The City University of New York
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independence fighters from prison raised fears among pro-statehood Puerto Ricans about the island’s “anti-American” image in the U.S. media. However, that film did not touch on the ambivalence that so many Puerto Ricans feel, which Pérez’ documentary highlights very personally.

Pérez’s hour-and-a-half-long film might have benefited from crisper editing and more coherent organization. She may have tried to include too many themes, thus shortchanging some of the details needed to convey information correctly. Other films dealing with the Puerto Rican diasporic experience and the island’s history include Mi Puerto Rico (1996) and Brincando el Charco (1994), both by accomplished Puerto Rican women filmmakers. Nonetheless, Pérez has managed to create an intensely personal as well as educational film that shows her as much more than a famous Hollywood star—she is a proud Boricua from the barrio with whom many Puerto Ricans—and others—will closely identify.

REFERENCES

One Nation, One Standard: An Ex-Liberal on How Hispanics Can Succeed Just Like Other Immigrant Groups

By Herman Badillo
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REVIEWER: ANGELO FALCÓN, National Institute for Latino Policy

In *One Nation, One Standard: An Ex-Liberal on How Hispanics Can Succeed Just Like Other Immigrant Groups,* Herman Badillo at age 78 sums up his considerable life’s lessons for the Puerto Rican and Hispanic community. Published under the auspices of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, where Mr. Badillo is a senior fellow, this book created a big stir within the Latino community even before it was released. First announced in the infamous tabloid, the *New York Post,* on December 19, 2006 with the headline, “Badillo Lashes Latinos, Rips Hispanic Values,” it generated strong feelings, not only about Badillo’s views on the issues, but also about him personally. It was a little eerie in the manner this response was so similar to the reactions in the Black community to comments made by Bill Cosby, the anti-affirmative campaigns of Ward Connerly, the recent book by Juan Williams, and the rulings of Supreme Courts Justice Clarence Thomas.

*One Nation, One Standard,* with a foreword by former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, is 228 pages long, with an additional eight pages of black-and-white pictures of Mr. Badillo’s early career in politics. Its eleven chapters cover the author’s life growing up in Puerto Rico and the United States, his rise to power as the first Puerto Rican to serve as a full commissioner of a city
agency, first borough president, first Congressman and first deputy mayor. It traces his dissatisfaction with the policy positions and politics of the Democratic Party, and his decision to leave the party and become a Republican. He covers his battles with the bureaucracies of the city’s public school system and its City University, as well as his role in promoting liberal legislation and policies at the local and national levels, such as bilingual education and the bilingual ballot provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act, which he now generally repudiates. He devotes a chapter to praising Giuliani and another on the future. In other words, the book covers a lot of ground.

The central problem Badillo seeks to address is that “(a)s a community, Hispanics have simply failed to recognize the overriding importance of education” (p. 30). He finds that “(t)he whole Hispanic community needs a total attitude adjustment regarding the importance of education” (p. 31). Looking specifically at Asians, he observes that, “Hispanics, as a culture, do place less stress on the importance of education than do other, more economically and socially successful immigrant groups” (p. 32). He concludes that, “Hispanics have no one to blame but themselves for the disastrous high-school dropout rates of the younger members of their community” (p. 31).

Badillo’s attribution to the entire Latino community of anti-education attitudes and behaviors is classic stereotyping. The worst of it is that he is stereotyping against himself and his own family, since one must assume that he still considers himself a Hispanic. The few statistics that Badillo cites, so central to his argument, are largely unsubstantiated. The “over 50 percent dropout rate” Badillo cites for 2005 is difficult to verify. The closest I could come is a 2005 working paper from the Manhattan Institute that argues that 52 percent of Latinos graduated from high school in 2002, using a methodology not used by the federal government (Greene and Winters 2005). The National Center for Education Statistics (2005), a federal government agency, reports for 2001 (the latest year available on their website) that the high school event dropout rate (dropouts in one year) for students aged 15–24 was 9 percent for Hispanics, compared to 6 percent for Blacks, 4 percent for Whites and 2 percent for Asians. The status high school dropout rate (total dropouts for the group) for those students aged 16–24, they report, was 27 percent for Hispanics, compared to 11 percent for Blacks, 7 percent for Whites and 4 percent for Asians, that same year. Relative to other major racial-ethnic groups, the Latino dropout rate is unacceptably high and is alarming, but Badillo’s “more than 50 percent” figure and his dating of it in 2005 appear to be made up.

Badillo’s exhortation to Latinos to eschew government solutions to problems is a good example of the inconsistency of much of his policy recommendations. He argues about the ineffectiveness and incompetence of government and its capture by special interests, but at the same time he points out that “although the pilot programs I developed in housing, employment, health and education did achieve some successes, the national support that those programs require(d) has varied between elusive and totally inexistent” (p. 2). In other words, the problems may not be inherent to government, but rather a lack of public support by government may be responsible for the difficulties Badillo mentions. This is one important inconsistency very early on in the book.

Badillo also tells Latino parents not to depend on the public schools and to be more self-reliant. While urging Latino parents not to blame policymakers for
their woes, he also complains about how institutions like public education conspire not to be held accountable, thus implying that they should be held more accountable. But the question is by whom? Well, according to Badillo, it appears that they should be held accountable to Badillo himself, and to people like Giuliani, Linda Chavez and the like.

The pity with much of the book is that Badillo does not see the irony in what he proposes. For example, when describing how he was almost trapped in a dead-end vocational track in high school, due to a "stroke of luck" a friend told him he should get into the academic program so he could go to college (pp. 14–5). He explains that: "I don't have any money for college,' I said . . . 'It doesn't matter,' my friend said. 'City College is free, and you'll get in if you have an academic diploma'" (p. 15). Badillo went on to major in business and accounting at CUNY and got a law degree from Brooklyn Law School, taking advantage of the free tuition policy of a public university. In light of this history, Badillo's anti-government rants ring a bit hollow.

Because Badillo sets himself up personally as the standard by which to judge Latino accomplishments, he invites characterization of himself as a leader and individual. Described by critics as "aloof" and "elitist," his third-person style of writing about his community reinforces this distance. Of the eight persons he thanks in his acknowledgement in the book, only one is Latino and that is his longtime secretary for typing the manuscript, reinforcing his detachment from the community he is writing about. He also cites very few Latino authors in the book. In the foreword, Giuliani explains in a very patronizing way that Badillo "never wanted to be thought of simply as a Hispanic, or as an immigrant, or as someone from a poor background.

His dignity demanded that he be judged as a man, that his accomplishments be taken seriously on the merits, and that he be rewarded or otherwise on the basis of what he has done, rather than who he was" (p. ix), as if these were mutually exclusive things.

And following this same pattern, this is the way Badillo separates what he considers the good from the bad guys (my terms):

Those who demand special rights for Hispanics are the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, the National Council of La Raza, Aspira, and other Hispanic organizations. Those who oppose them and continue to promote assimilation include Linda Chavez, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Harvard professor Stephan Thernstrom and his wife and co-author, Abigail, and the Manhattan Institute (a New York think tank). (p. 210)

Being a founder of some of these Hispanic organizations, Badillo doesn't explain what role he played in recent years in the development of their advocacy agendas. Did he serve on their boards, or make significant financial or volunteer contributions? He presents himself as someone not engaged in his own community for quite some time.

Badillo attempts to explain much of the Latino community's current problems by reference to their cultural values' roots in the Spanish colonization of Latin America. He repeats the myth that Spain's legacy to Latin America and by extension the Latino immigrant is a religiously based set of non-racialized attitudes and practices, which he counts
as perhaps its greatest contribution to Latino culture. But he also characterized this Spanish legacy as promoting "a disregard for the rule of law, an indifference to participatory democracy, . . . and a lack of enthusiasm for education" (p. 3). He characterizes this as a result of "a five-century siesta" in Latin America. But for some reason he omits any discussion of the United States’s influence on and political and military interventions in Latin America, most specifically the more than one century of its control over Puerto Rico.

This book is certainly not a politically innocent project. Badillo acknowledges that he wrote it at the suggestion of the head of the Manhattan Institute. The foreword by Rudy Giuliani, then a virtually declared candidate for President in 2008, results in Badillo’s significant detour in the narrative of the book to praise Giuliani in detail. Finally, his support of their libertarian, open-borders immigration position has resulted in much of his book reading like one of their annual reports.

Ultimately, Badillo’s book reveals the real limits of liberalism when it comes to the issue of race. While he characterizes himself as an "ex-liberal," his policy recommendations are in and of themselves not necessarily "conservative" or "neo-conservative." His association with Giuliani, and former New York Governor Mario Cuomo’s praise of the book as "brilliant," both attest to this. His general criticisms of government bureaucracy and school policies on tracking, the abuse of gifted and special education programs, and his support of greater parent involvement in the schools are not controversial and would be embraced by most in the Latino community.

Despite this, Badillo’s overgeneralization about the lack of support for education by Latinos amounts to a negative stereotype that undermines his basic message. His sloppy documentation of the extent of the problem of Latino poverty and the dropout rate raises questions about the accuracy of his analysis and makes these problems appear much more insurmountable than they are. While he obviously wants to convey a positive message of hope, in the end he presents a picture that generates despair and anger instead. Perhaps the book’s title should be changed to “One Nation, Polarized.”

REFERENCES


