

The New Plantation Mentality

by Charles Sykes

This week it became official: it is now acceptable to use racially-charged slurs against African-Americans . . . as long as they are conservative.

Setting a new standard for acceptable stereotyping, a *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* editorial on the president's nomination of Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court opined:

"In losing a woman, the court with Alito would feature seven white men, one white woman and a black man, who deserves an asterisk because he arguably does not represent the views of mainstream black America."

In other words, Clarence Thomas doesn't count as black, because he doesn't think or behave like a black person is supposed to — a not-so-distance echo of the schoolyard jibe that a successful minority student was "acting white."

Noted one critical blogger: "Somewhere in Milwaukee, a teenage boy or girl read this comment and chose not to enroll in college and become successful because they don't want an asterisk by their name."

The "asterisk" for Thomas was not quite as overt as last year's slur by a Madison talk show host that Condoleeza Rice was an "Aunt Jemima" or the portrayal of Maryland Lt. Governor Michael Steele as "Sambo" on a liberal website. But the message was the same: you cannot be both conservative and black. And any black who exercises independent thought and breaks with the left can be subjected to the crudest of racial slurs, stereotypes, and reductionism. The message: Deviate and we will turn on you.

Thus the dark side of diversity: group identity trumps individual identity. If you are a minority, you will be judged not by the content of your character, but by the color of your skin and your willingness to be "representative" of its dominant ideology. Under this logic, had the president appointed Janice Rogers Brown, she would not have counted either as a woman or a black, although she is both. Under the "asterisk" test, minorities only count if they stay on the liberal plantation.

The left's contempt for conservative minorities is, of course, not new. But it has seldom been stated so bluntly and openly and it comes at a time when the acceptable bigotry of the left is increasingly on display.

In Maryland, Democratic activists have reportedly pelted Michael Steele with "oreos," and openly label the conservative senate candidate an "Uncle Tom." Party activists and elected officials now openly defend such conduct. Explained one Baltimore pol: "Because he is a conservative, he is different than most public blacks, and he is different than most people in our community," she said.

For the race lords, “difference” is a bad thing, certainly not something that can be tolerated in the name of diversity.

Similarly, the author of the *Journal Sentinel* editorial defends reducing Justice Thomas to an “asterisk,” by telling one irate reader that because “Thomas often takes stands at odds with mainstream black thought, his appointment does not help the court mirror America as much as it could have — which is what diversity is all about.”

He continues: “Noting that Thomas is on the fringes of black thought is merely observing a fact, not stereotyping. Justices Stevens and Ginsburg do represent wide swaths of American thought.”

Perhaps unconsciously, Stanford gives away the game: Stevens and Ginsburg — both of whom are white — “represent wide swaths of American thought” — presumably left-wing thought.

But Thomas, who also represents a wide swath of American thought — conservatism — “is on the fringes of black thought.”

Note that Stevens and Ginsburg are not described relative to “white thought.” They are allowed to think as individuals, not reduced to group representatives.

The racial category is reserved for Thomas, who apparently doesn't understand that he is supposed to stay in the intellectual ghetto and not try to be judged by the standards of “American” thought, like his white colleagues. The unstated — but quite clear — assumption is that white justices engage in “American thought,” while a black justice is expected/required to engage in “black thought.”

The word for this is “apartheid.”

Ironically, a *Journal Sentinel* editor wrote on Thursday: “The assumption that people of color are a homogeneous lot with a single set of beliefs is as offensive and racist as any other stereotype assigned to them.”

The comment appeared on the same page as the “asterisk” editorial. But, so far the paper has failed to either clarify or apologize for the slur.