

VIRTUAL RACISM

Ben Kinchlow

I once read a quote that really stuck with me: *"I have come...to assert my right to think for myself, to refuse to have my ideas assigned to me, as though I was an intellectual slave."* (Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas)

Although it occurred some years prior to my learning of this quote, I had come to a similar position on my own. Born in a small Texas town at the close of the Great Depression to a hard-working laborer and his schoolteacher wife, I learned firsthand about biscuits and home fried chicken. We raised our own chickens and rolled out our biscuits on the kitchen table. I have hands-on experience with doing without and with hand-me-downs. In my home town, Blacks attended a four-classes-in-one-room "separate-but-equal" school where we learned reading, writing, and arithmetic; "No Ben, it's not `rithmetic!" Like all young Blacks, I knew about "Jim Crow" from early childhood. We learned early on about lynchings and how to avoid putting oneself in a potential *situation*. In the wild, this would have been tantamount to learning survival skills.

Today we hear much about *victimization*. Somehow, it has become almost a badge of honor, especially among some African-Americans. Black children "back in the day" were not taught that we were victims, objects of pity, disadvantaged, or underprivileged. We learned the hard facts about slavery from "the old folks" and from our family histories. Some of us had great-grandparents who had been born in slavery. My great-great-grandfather, Ben Kinchlow, was born a slave.

We were not taught, or believed or thought, that Blacks were the government's responsibility. Slavery was seldom used as an excuse for, or a justification for, failure. Back then, black folks' version of Affirmative Action was "root hog or die." Black pride was not about Afros, Dashikis (African garb), or boys wearing "dreads" (dreadlocks). It was about the girl who did **not** get pregnant out of wedlock but finished school, and the boy who got a degree or a steady job and supported the girl he **married**, not gotten pregnant and then abandoned.

Let me be perfectly clear, Blacks are not born wards of the state. Our mental capacities are not underdeveloped because of something that happened to our forebears over 200 years ago. Tens of millions of words, and countless scholarly works, have been written about the "Negro," the "Black", the "Afro-American," and now "African-American" experience or condition. I am sure few intelligent people would deny that slavery was an egregious stain on the fabric of the great American experiment. But that was then, this is now. A black president, two former secretaries of state, and a sitting Supreme Court justice (to name just a few) testify to that.

After being made aware of certain historical facts (see my book Black YellowDogs), I began to challenge the flawed concept of simply voting in blind faith regardless of the party or the candidate. Tragically, however, it seems many of us in the African-American community have ignored an ancient Biblical warning that could easily apply to many of our so-called *leaders* today. ***"Beware... they are blind guides, and if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit."***

The time has come for more of us to consider this paraphrase of the aforementioned quote: "...**We** must all assert our rights to think for ourselves, to refuse to have our ideas assigned to us as though we were intellectual slaves."