

## Just Around the Corner:

There's a whole new America coming, a place that is just a tad frightening for citizens of the old America. I suppose it's always been that way. As the country changes with each generation, as radio replaced yarn spinning and as TV replaced radio (except in the car) the citizens of the older generation felt a certain foreboding as their familiar world moved on and moved out. When the ethnic and cultural mix of a town changes as the old jobs leave and the new employers enter, the folks who live in the big houses on the corner lots tend to eye the newcomers with suspicion. The established order is wary of the increasingly significant next order.

We are witnessing a version of that phenomenon in the confirmation hearings for Judge Sotomayor. The old order, the outgoing power brokers and king makers, white men from the South and Border States, sat questioning the nominee from their own unique point of view. A large component of that view is the realization among these Senators that they are looking at the future, a future without them. It is a future where their progeny will control a decreasing and ever more local slice of the pie. In Sotomayor's face they see an America that is increasingly influenced by people with brown and black skin, by people who did not inherit their positions, by people who are women. It makes sense that the old line Senators are frightened by what they see. When one's identity is based on the influence that one wields any diminishment of that influence is a threat.

The two fastest growing states in the Union, Texas and California, have populations that are a majority non white. By 2023 non whites will constitute the majority of Americans under the age of 18. By 2042 the majority of *all* Americans will be Black, Hispanic or Asian. That is just thirty two years down the road. It's something that is inevitable. It will happen regardless of how one feels about it, regardless of what your pet threat might be. Over the course of the coming years myriad new sights, sounds and scents will be increasingly present. Music and entertainment will continue to expand its already diverse base. More and more consumers will be coming into the market and they won't be looking for Lawrence Welk or lutefisk.

I understand why some of the gentlemen who questioned Sonia Sotomayor were so skeptical and even antagonistic towards her. What they want is a Judge and a Supreme Court in their own image. They

want a court full of Scalias and Alitos. If they can't have white men and must accept a woman of color then they want her to at least mouth the principle that they hold dearest, strict interpretation of an unchanging Constitution. They didn't get it from her and it angers and frightens them. They worry that the Court's next few members will be left leaning, "empathetic" jurists. Judges in that mold can not be counted on to support the existing order of things, the order that places and keeps old men in positions of maximum influence. A Court full of women and minorities is a dangerous Court whereas a Court full of old men can be counted on. It's that simple.

It's the same with the rest of our society I suppose. Tradition, respectability and status currently reside, in large part, with the culture that has been dominant since white Protestants removed the Native population from most of the continent. White America has seen itself as favored by the Almighty and History as well. They found themselves in charge because it was pre ordained that they be in charge. It was their destiny to set the rules and lead the way and the destiny of minorities to mimic the dominant culture or get out of the way. A society can make that formula work almost indefinitely but only so long as the dominant culture comprises the majority of citizens. When the numbers turn upside down the formula starts to unravel. You hear different music on the radio. You notice new restaurants with "ethnic" specialties. You see bilingual street signs. You notice a neighbor who is not a Christian. You see a man of color residing in the White House. Change happens. Change will always happen.

It seems to me that the trick for happiness in a changing world is to keep your own integrity intact be you Irish or Lutheran while accepting the notion that your clan is no longer in control of all the details. Easy to say but not so easy to live. So every time I find myself feeling slightly superior to a society or lifestyle I recite my favorite statement addressing a diverse planet. It was written by Wade Davis.

"The world into which you were born is just one model of reality. Other cultures are not failed attempts at being you: they are unique manifestations of the human spirit."