

the United States is usually identified as a black man? Or, that he was raised by his white mother and grandparents and had access to private education? How does he characterize himself and why doesn't this always coincide with the way others describe him? Also, what counts most when it comes to Justice Sonia Sotomayor's identity? Is her presence on the bench significant because she's only the third woman to serve, or because she's the first Puerto Rican? Perhaps what is noteworthy is that she was raised by a working mother in a Bronx housing project and is a "dental bill debtor"? **(1)** Because class is frequently conflated with race or ethnicity, assumptions about someone else's identity are often left unexamined and there is a tendency to *misidentify* people based on relatively superficial characteristics. Whether or not President Obama and Justice Sotomayor can provide satisfying answers to these questions, I hope to present some food for thought. **(2)**

In order to explore this further, I will be using the work of Franz Boas and Alain Locke on "race," "human types" and "culture." I will also refer to Pierre Bourdieu who offers a complex account of "class" and distinguishes three forms of "capital."

Nearly a century ago, Boas and Locke criticized static concepts of race and ethnicity as deeply problematic. More specifically, both argued that social relationships, culture and environment say more about "human types" than race, and that it is less constant and more complex than previously believed. **(3)**

After noticing a "decided plasticity of human types," Boas claims,

the mental make-up of a certain type of man may be considerably influenced by his social and geographical environment...mental manifestations depend to a great extent upon the social group in which each individual grows up (Bernasconi, pp. 87-8).

Even physiological differences may be environmentally determined given that, "numerous investigations...have been made on the proportions of the body of the well-to-do and of the poor [and] all show characteristic differences." (Bernasconi, p.85) There is nothing particularly surprising about this today -- links between poverty,

obesity, diabetes, etc. have since been well documented. However, what is still rarely acknowledged is the extent to which a "social and geographical environment" is affected by economic conditions and the ways in which that influences one's "mental make-up." For example, neighborhoods are characterized as "good" or "nice" vis-a-vis "tough" or "bad" -- terms which are almost always synonymous with "rich" and "poor," respectively. So, where are the philosophical articles which explore what these terms mean or consider the consequences of such conditions on personal identity? Since "the self" has been a central issue for philosophy for centuries, why don't philosophers devote more time to reflecting on the cultural significance of class and its implications?

Boas also points out that cultural distinctions can be observed between rural and urban peoples. Namely, "that the change in type which has been observed in America is...analogous to the difference of type that has been observed in Europe in a comparison between the urban population and rural

Not only does Locke notice the symbolic aspect of race, he directly confronts its historical origins and current significance. Specifically, who one is, how she identifies herself or is identified by others, depends upon specific social, cultural and environmental conditions. Moreover, Locke relies on terms like "culture-type" or "social race," to distinguish his position from those based on biological or physiological difference, and insists that "blood intermixture is only one of the conducive conditions to cultural assimilation." On this view, instead of regarding culture as expressive of race, "race by this interpretation is regarded as itself a culture product." In examining different sociological studies, he concludes that, "the best procedure would be to substitute for the term *race* the term *culture-group*." (Bernasconi, pp. 94

economic status and that is generally true of Puerto Ricans as well -- no one wants to be considered "white" (i.e., wealthy and spoiled) **or** "black" (i.e., destitute and low-class). So, given what Locke says, should *boricuas* be considered a distinct culture-group? And, how should "culture-group" be defined?

In response to the last question, Locke's position is somewhat

like race, ethnicity and culture, why not do the same for class-consciousness and personal identity? Assuming that it's possible to, at least provisionally, define a culture-group, how might class-groups or types be identified and distinguished?

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body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.)...; in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification...[for instance] educational qualifications (Richardson, p. 243).

What is most salient for personal identity is "embodied cultural capital" for it is most intimately tied to oneself. However, it is the hardest to convert because of the time it takes to cultivate and

example, if I have to spend all my waking hours working in order to eat or insure that my basic physiological needs are met, there is little time to read literature, study science or pursue a college degree. In conclusion,

the length of time for which a given individual can prolong his acquisition process depends on the length of time for which his family can provide him with the free time, i.e., time free from economic necessity, which is the precondition for the initial accumulation... (Richardson, p. 247).

This is where the link, between economic and cultural capital, is most evident. Moreover, it demonstrates that it is not necessarily a mistake to conflate the two. Specifically, those who are born into economically privileged families have the "free time" to earn educational qualifications -- cultural capital that may later be transformed into economic capital. It explains why education is considered so significant to class identity, why working parents are willing to sacrifice their own time to provide opportunities for their children. The hope is that the next generation will be able to put cultural capital to use and obtain greater economic security. In other words, "time *is* money." Finally, just as the poor are ever conscious that they lack economic capital and financial security so too are most working folk aware that time is limited. Perhaps this explains why my own parents,

linguistic heritage, religion, spirituality, sexuality, etc. However, if this is correct, class-consciousness is closer to sexual orientation than gender or ethnic identity. Since one's socio-economic status or level of education is largely invisible, identifying as "low-class" can be as painful as being "outed" as gay, especially if the dominant culture is unsympathetic or of a different type.

In conclusion, I think everyone is "multicultural," to some degree and in different respects, for each of us has a diverse ethnic heritage and relatively complex personal history. Static categories of race, ethnicity, class and culture are overly simplistic and can be completely inappropriate when it comes to identifying who or "what" someone is. And, determining which defining characteristics are most significant almost always depends on context. It also seems that a commitment to diversity will always involve some collateral damage. In other words, hurt feelings, offended sensibilities and misunderstandings are an unavoidable consequence of colliding cultural differences. Nonetheless, the pain of these encounters can be mitigated and there is a lot to learn, about ourselves and each other, that would be otherwise impossible. As I constantly remind my students, philosophy is not for the timid -- neither is a commitment to multiculturalism and diversity!

