

**Record: 1****Title:** Another proud baby of affirmative action**Authors:** Laura E. Gomez**Source:** USA Today. 07/10/2009.**ISSN:** 0734-7456**Accession Number:** J0E386733181809**Database:** Newspaper Source**Another proud baby of affirmative action**

Section: News, Pg. 09a

Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor's speeches are like a Rorschach inkblot test: We hear what we want to hear. A few weeks ago, The New York Times reported that in a speech from the early 1990s, Sotomayor acknowledged that her Puerto Rican heritage played a role in her admissions to Princeton University (where she graduated summa cum laude) and Yale Law School (where she was a top student). Her comments may take on new meaning for opponents of affirmative action in light of the Supreme Court's decision last week in the firefighters' case.

Here's what I hear in her remark that she is "an affirmative action baby." I was admitted to Princeton and other Ivy League colleges 10 years after Sotomayor, having attended a public high school in Albuquerque where many students never graduated. Four years later, I graduated with honors from Harvard. Later, I earned two degrees at Stanford and, while clerking on the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, I was hired to teach law at UCLA. In 2001, I became the second Latina tenured by a Top 20 law school.

I've described myself as "an affirmative action baby" many times over the years. Depending on the audience I was addressing, I've meant to send a variety of messages with this statement. Sometimes, I've used it to show bravado, as if to say, "Come on, affirmative action foes, just you try to assail my qualifications."

At other times, I've used it to signal my collective solidarity with my brothers of color and sisters, both white and minority, who have so often been attacked as undeserving beneficiaries of affirmative action.

Under other circumstances, I've used the phrase to critique meritocracy, calling into question the validity of quantitative tests as accurate measures of one's past accomplishments or one's future potential (such as the suitability of the test at issue in the promotion of firefighters in New Haven, Conn.).

In other contexts, I've used the phrase to distance myself from Yale law professor Stephen Carter's book *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*. My experience had little in common with his narrative of shame.

I disagree with those who worry that we concede too much by admitting the role affirmative action has played in our successes. I've not tarnished my achievements by acknowledging doors were opened for me because of race and gender. Instead, I've stressed what I accomplished once I crossed the threshold.

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**Source:** USA Today, JUL 10, 2009

**Item:** J0E386733181809