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New javac warning for setting an older source without bootclasspath

By darcy on [Dec 22, 2010](#)

To use `javac` from JDK *N* to cross-compile to an older platform version, the [correct practice](#) is to:

- Use the older `-source` setting.
- Set the `bootclasspath` to compile against the `rt.jar` (or equivalent) for the older platform.

If the second step is *not* taken, `javac` will dutifully use the old language rules combined with new libraries, which can result in class files that do *not* work on the older platform since references to non-existent methods can get included.

Thanks to [work by Jon Gibbons](#), in JDK 7 build 121 and later `javac` detects and warns about this suspicious situation; for example:

```
$ javac -source 6 HelloWorld.java
warning: [options] bootstrap class path not set in conjunction with -source 1.6
```

One way to address the warning is to set the `bootclasspath`. If that is inappropriate, the warning can be disabled with a new suboption within the `-Xlint` family, `-Xlint:-options`.

With this change, a likely problematic combination of options to `javac` that can lead to subtle build errors are diagnosed by the compiler and can easily be either directly addressed, or documented as part of the build process via the

new -Xlint suboption.

Category: Java

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I like the small and concise snippets of information about new features.

It's a great way to keep up to speed with the jdk as well as learn aspects of the language which are shielded from by using certain IDEs

Is there any other interesting sources of information (blogs, announcements etc..) you know of with a similar format

Posted by [whatsthebeef](#) on December 22, 2010 at 06:37 AM PST <#>

@whatsthebeef,

Besides the blogs.sun.com tag stream for JDK 7:

<http://blogs.sun.com/main/tags/jdk7>

Alex Miller has a feed of JDK 7 links:

<http://java7.tumblr.com/>

And many of Dalibor's OpenJDK tweets related to JDK 7:

<http://twitter.com/openjdk>

Posted by [Joe Darcy](#) on December 23, 2010 at 05:32 AM PST <#>

Isn't this setting misleading? Setting the bootclasspath will work when a new method is added, but if a new class has been added (e.g. StringBuilder), it will still be found from the newer rt.jar. I feel that doing this instead of building on the actual older JDK gives a false sense of security, without ensuring compatibility.

Posted by [Jevgeni Kabanov](#) on December 25, 2010 at 12:47 AM PST <#>

@Jevgeni,

Setting the bootclasspath option of javac is exactly the option which prevents javac from looking for (and finding) new classes, such as StringBuilder in the rt.jar (or equivalent) on the current platform.

Building on an older JDK works too of course.

Posted by [Joe Darcy](#) on December 27, 2010 at 05:59 AM PST <#>

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