



# Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class

By Ian Haney López

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Campaigning for president in 1980, Ronald Reagan told stories of Cadillac-driving "welfare queens" and "strapping young bucks" buying T-bone steaks with food stamps. In trumpeting these tales of welfare run amok, Reagan never needed to mention race, because he was blowing a dog whistle: sending a message about racial minorities inaudible on one level, but clearly heard on another. In doing so, he tapped into a long political tradition that started with George Wallace and Richard Nixon, and is more relevant than ever in the age of the Tea Party and the first black president.

In *Dog Whistle Politics*, Ian Haney López offers a sweeping account of how politicians and plutocrats deploy veiled racial appeals to persuade white voters to support policies that favor the extremely rich yet threaten their own interests. Dog whistle appeals generate middle-class enthusiasm for political candidates who promise to crack down on crime, curb undocumented immigration, and protect the heartland against Islamic infiltration, but ultimately vote to slash taxes for the rich, give corporations regulatory control over industry and financial markets, and aggressively curtail social services. White voters, convinced by powerful interests that minorities are their true enemies, fail to see the connection between the political agendas they support and the surging wealth inequality that takes an increasing toll on their lives. The tactic continues at full force, with the Republican Party using racial provocations to drum up enthusiasm for weakening unions and public pensions, defunding public schools, and opposing health care reform.

Rejecting any simple story of malevolent and obvious racism, Haney López links as never before the two central themes that dominate American politics today: the decline of the middle class and the Republican Party's increasing reliance on white voters. *Dog Whistle Politics* will generate a lively and much-needed debate about how racial politics has destabilized the American middle class -- white and nonwhite members alike.

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#### **Review**

"As Haney Lopez demonstrates, the vocabulary of race has changed. Nonetheless, race is still skillfully used to distract our attention from ongoing and pernicious disparities in economic opportunities. Read this terrific book to understand how dog whistle politics enables the wealth gap to stay the same and even to get worse not just for blacks or other people of color but for the white working class as well." --Lani Guinier, Bennett Boskey Professor, Harvard Law School

"This is one of those books that should be required reading for anyone and everyone who is struggling to understand how and why political elites succeed, time and again, in persuading poor and working class whites to support regressive policies that are a boon for corporations but actually harm them and wreck the middle class. The answer to the riddle has far more to do with race than most want to acknowledge. But it isn't old-fashioned, malevolent racism that's to blame. No, as Haney Lopez brilliantly and painstakingly lays bare, what is unraveling our nation is not bad people, but a stubborn refusal to deal openly and honestly with the reality of how race operates today." --Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*

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"A brilliant guide to modern politics, for anyone who wants to understand how outright racist appeals morphed into the genteel rhetoric of 'states rights' and from there into today's 'defund Obamacare' -- and why Democrats too often collude in rather than repudiate dog whistle politics." --Joan Walsh, *Salon.com* and *MSNBC*, and author of *What's the Matter With White People*

"Grounded in history rather than theory, this is recommended to readers engaged in today's political discourse." --Library Journal

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## About the Author

**Ian Haney López** is the John H. Boalt Professor of Law at the University of California, Berkeley. An incisive voice on white identity since the publication of his path-breaking book *White by Law* (1996), he remains at the forefront of conversations about race in modern America. A past visiting professor at Yale and Harvard law schools, in 2011 he was awarded the Alphonse Fletcher Fellowship, given to scholars whose work promotes the integration goals of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

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