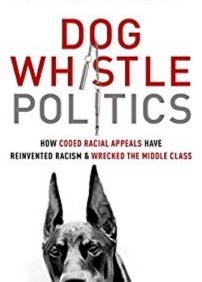# Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism And Wrecked The Middle Class

IAN HANEY LÓPEZ

DOG WHISTLE POLITICS

HOW CODED RACIAL APPEALS HAVE REINVENTED RACISM & WRECKED THE MIDDLE CLASS

Synopsis

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 Lopez 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 Lopez 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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Customer Reviews

Any doubt that dog whistles - code words that turn Americans against each other - is a relevant topic in 2014 is illustrated by Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy and Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling.Author Ian Haney LÃ pez was interviewed on Bill Moyers' PBS show last February. He described the motivation behind the political tactic, the "dark magic" used to seduce middle-class voters."It comes out of a desire to win votes," Haney LÃ pez told Moyers. "And in that sense... It's racism as a strategy. It's cold, it's calculating, it's considered, it's the decision to achieve one's own ends, here winning votes, by stirring racial animosity."It would be hard to say from which political perspective (party) this book touches most. For a Republican, it is a reminder that the party's appeal to white Americans includes a racist element. For a Democrat, the book serves as a scorecard for the party's failure to illuminate and defeat dog whistle strategies.The book is even-handed and well researched, but not entertaining likeÂ All's Fair: Love, War, and Running for President. I imagine the book elicits outrage in many readers but, for me, it was a dour read. Several times, I wanted to stop reading because the subject matter is so depressing. I associate this to watchingÂ Schindler's List, an experience you should take once but not one made for repeat viewings/readings.Rating: Five stars

What starts off as a historical review of communicating racism via covert political language to win elections, AKA dog whistle politics, eventually transforms into a plea for more public discourse on race in general. Lopez's biggest point of contention is the trend toward a belief that we have graduated to a post-racial, colorblind world. His critique of this view further inflames the controversy, as probably intended. While many see colorblindness as the natural end-goal of race relations, Lopez considers it another form of unintentionally coded racism. This naturally provokes the already-uneasy peace many have made with the issue.I'll admit I was one of those who regarded colorblindness as the morally superior position. And now the author has got me second-guessing that assertion. The solutions he proposes don't seem right to me, but now neither does my current belief on race. I recommend Dog Whistle Politics if you're willing to concede that the issue of race in

America is much more complex than previously thought.

I always wondered how the talking-heads on the air were getting away with their racist comments and ideas and this book explains why. And it also explains how the racism is an 'on purpose' strategy by both Republicans and Democrats (but mostly Republicans) to win votes. All a politician has to do is talk about 'welfare queens' or 'big government' or the President's 'birth certificate and it may not sound racist to people who don't harbor mental views about those phrases, but to many people across America...it conjures up mental pictures that actually are racist in nature. People who secretly believe that everyone on welfare is black and doesn't want to work...the term 'welfare queen' is an image that brings that to life. 'Big government' is a term that conjures up images in the minds of many people of white America having to grow a bigger government in order to take care of the freeloading 'others' who aren't white. And talking about the President's birth certificate suggests that he is an 'other'...someone who does not belong here. It would be ridiculous if it wasn't true, but it is. Code words and phrases get otherwise sensible, middle class people to vote against their best interests. And the worst part of all this is that the ones spouting these phrases aren't necessarily racist, but have found that using these code words get them votes. If you wonder why the middle class has lost so much ground, you need to read this book.

As I write, partisan media are backpedaling furiously from anti-government rancher Cliven Bundy. Certain sectors made Bundy a hero because he refused to pay taxes, claiming government authority stopped at state level. But tape has come forward showing Bundy making sweeping statements about Ã¢Â Âœthe Negro,Ã¢Â Â• culminating in asking: Ã¢Â ÂœAre they better off as slaves?Ã¢Â Â• But nobody who reads Ian Haney LÃ pez will find such language surprising anymore.For half a century now, Haney LÃ pez asserts, subliminal racial language has inflected American political discourse. Even as Americans vocally reject white supremacy, Ã¢Â ÂœChristian Identity,Ã¢Â Â• and other unreconstructed apartheid, outwardly neutral discourse with racial implications has conquered politics. ItÃ¢Â Â™s surprisingly bipartisan, pervasive, and successful. Politicians who use what Haney LÃ pez calls Ã¢Â Âœcoded racial appealsÃ¢Â Â• get elected; those who avoid it, donÃ¢Â Â™t.Politicians will avoid talking about race directly. But theyÃ¢Â Â™ll discuss Ã¢Â Âœthe undeserving poor, illegal aliens, and Sharia law,Ã¢Â Â• as Haney LÃ pez writes, themes which have indubitable racial inferences. When Ronald Reagan talked about Ã¢Â Âœwelfare queens,Ã¢Â Â• nobody pictured white trailer trash; his implications were distinctly anti-black. When Bill Clinton prosecuted drug-war tactics with especial vigor, citizens caught in his

dragnet shared characteristics based on skin color. Haney López calls this "dog whistle politics" because it's completely inaudible on one level, yet irrefutably present. The connection between, say, race and "law and order," isn't superficially obvious. But long-term cultural cues, which correlate criminality with skin melanin, have created an unconscious stereotypes of criminals as especially brown. When politicians, particularly white politicians, promise to enforce laws, cut welfare, prosecute fraud, and return the savings to you, the taxpayer, they implicitly promise to preserve and extend white privilege. Don't look to one political party for racial language, though. While activists hype Republican dog whistles, Haney López reports, the technique was invented by Southern Democrats, especially George Wallace, a former moderate supported by the NAACP before discovering that race-baiting worked electorally. Jimmy Carter had to walk back language about "racial purity," and Bill Clinton supervised the execution of a brain-damaged black inmate to prove his Tough On Crime credentials. Dog whistle language has had chilling effects on American discourse. When politicians cite old racial stereotypes without naming race, they gain plausible deniability. And when somebody points out that such-and-such has grim racial implications, the first person who says this gets called "racist." This stops serious efforts to redress bigotry's lingering implications, since anyone who would remedy, say, systemic black poverty, fears repercussions for bringing race into public dialog. Such sub-rosa racial language, however, hasn't really limited its consequences to select populations. By severing the "we're all in this together" coalitions that propelled the New Deal and Great Society, politicians have undercut support for post-WWII social policies that fostered a growing American middle class. Far from protecting white privilege, coded racial language has democratized poverty and hastened concentrations of wealth unseen since Robber Baron days. In this, Haney López echoes Howard Zinn. Both observe that American racism didn't just happen; going back to colonial times, wealthy interests encouraged racial animosity because if black, red, and poor white people fought each other, they'd never join forces against the rich whites controlling their lives. Racism, then, has never ultimately been about race. Like Cliven Bundy, race-baiting demagogues want no organized opposition to them keeping gross wealth unopposed. Haney López readily admits that your milage may vary, depending on your definition of racism. Public displays of Archie Bunker-style bigotry have become vanishingly rare in American politics. Without burning crosses and N-bombs, it's easy to believe racism has vanished from American public life. Indeed, in later chapters, Haney López admits that opponents can defuse unconscious racial appeals, by simply using the dictionary to call them what they are. These conclusions should surprise nobody, social

conservatives least of all. PJ O'Rourke, no bleeding heart himself, observed nearly twenty-five years ago that significant public rhetoric contains oblique racial language. Gut revulsion at overt racism is, today, overwhelmingly bipartisan. If activists, politicians, and common citizens join together in refusing to tolerate dog whistle appeals, race-baiting demagogues will quickly find themselves starved for money and funds.Recent decades have seen undeniably ugly turns in American politics. Circumstances have hit new lows when $4 billion for food stamps elicits more outrage than $80 billion for bank bailouts. Haney López persuasively hangs this divisiveness on covert appeals to class, gender, and especially race. Fortunately, things aren't uniformly grim. If citizens reject dog whistle language and stand together, we needn't accept greedy forces disuniting our states for short-term gain.

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