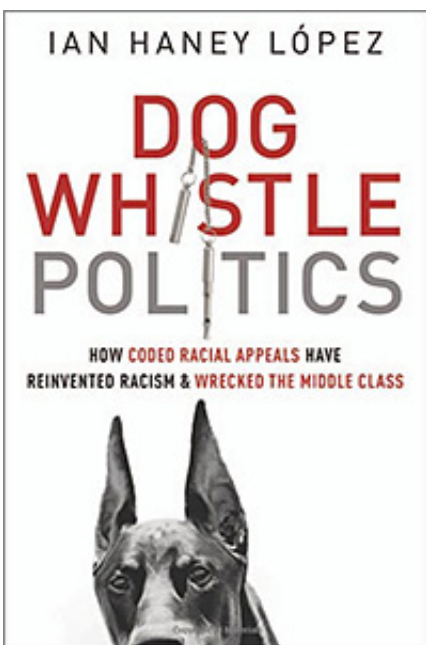


# Law prof: Coded racial appeals have wrecked the middle class

January 15 2014, by Leslie A. Gordon

---



Two central themes are dominating American politics: the decline of the middle class and the Republican Party's increasing reliance on white voters, according to *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*. The new book by Berkeley Law professor Ian Haney-López traces both developments to veiled racial appeals to white voters in support of policies that favor the extremely rich.

While spending much of the last decade studying how the U.S. Supreme Court handled race law, Haney-López documented a near complete reversal from earlier efforts at [racial integration](#). "I determined that the shift was due to politics, not doctrine," he explained. New racial politics tells voters not to worry about concentrated wealth, but instead to believe that a big government pandering to minorities is the biggest threat, he found.

Specifically, Haney-López traced what he calls a political tradition of using race rhetoric to generate [middle class](#) enthusiasm for conservative policies that threaten their own interests. Powerful political groups promise to "crack down on crime," "curb undocumented immigration," and "protect the heartland" against Islamic infiltration, but instead back policies that slash taxes on the rich, grant corporations control over industry and financial markets, and eradicate social services.

"People think that we're post-racial because we have a black president, but the language of race has just shifted form in the last 50 years," explained Haney-López, who uses the term dog whistle to describe the coded terms that "trigger racial anxiety," yet can be claimed as nonracial by politicians.. Through dog whistles, conservative interest groups send a message about [racial minorities](#) that are inaudible on one level, but clearly heard on another, he said.

Examples of race-baiting terms by politicians include forced bussing, welfare queens, illegal aliens and food stamps. "The narrative is well known, but when put all together, it's egregious," Haney-López said. "Yet, when politicians are called to account, they say, 'It's just a fact.' They're using racially charged terms with plausible deniability. The book explains how race is working this way, how race is the central, defining element of electoral politics. It's still so powerful in our society even when it seems we're post-racial."

As proof, Haney-López cited the fact that the Republican Party is 90 percent white and its elected officials are 98 percent white. The Republican Party casts minorities as the enemy, but white voters fail to see the connection between the political agendas they support and the surging wealth inequality that takes an increasing toll on their own lives. Ultimately, Haney-López argued, to achieve a vibrant middle class without racial modifiers, the country needs an "activist government that's good for everybody, not one that's just beholden to the very wealthy."

Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, said Dog Whistle Politics "brilliantly and painstakingly" explains how political elites persuade poor and working class whites to support regressive policies that are a boon for corporations, but actually harm them and the middle class.

A seasoned author, Haney-López has written about white and Latino racial identity in *White by Law* and *Racism on Trial*, respectively. This book, though, is his first for a broad audience. He believes it's for anyone who is frustrated with the dysfunction in the U.S. political system and senses that we're a country in crisis.

"I hope to start a new national conversation," said Haney-López, who teaches Constitutional Law, Race in American Law and seminars including Critical Race Theory. "This topic is central to the health of American democracy."

**More information:** [www.marketwatch.com/story/raci ...4-01-08?pagenumber=2](http://www.marketwatch.com/story/raci...4-01-08?pagenumber=2)

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

Citation: Law prof: Coded racial appeals have wrecked the middle class (2014, January 15)  
retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-01-law-prof-coded-racial-appeals.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.