1.2
Using dog whistles to undermine government

RACE-CLASS
ACADEMY

Key building blocks

The crucial insight is that dog whistling is a form of storytelling. It's a narrative with certain elements that repeat over and over. The details change, but the story remains familiar—and the very familiarity of the story makes it more powerful. This requires that you understand:

- The **scarcity script**. It uses racist stereotypes of undeserving people of color to trash liberal government while it presents White people as the supposed victims
- The **threat script**. It uses racist stereotypes of violent people of color to . . . you guessed it, trash liberal government and make White people the supposed victims
- The three **core elements of the dog whistle story**: (1) fear and resent people of color; (2) hate government; and (3) trust the marketplace

Anti-racist protip

Dog whistling aims to trigger racist stereotypes. So to figure out how to defeat dog whistling, we need to surface those injurious myths. But this can be dangerous. If we're not careful, we can easily fall into the habit of merely repeating racist myths.

For instance, "law and order" trades on stereotypes of Black people as violent and White people as innocent victims. But now compare two ways of discussing this:

"violent Black people and innocent White people"
versus
"supposedly violent Black people and allegedly innocent White people"

Words like "supposedly" and "allegedly"—and others, like "stereotypically," or phrases like "in this myth" or "according to this racist story"—help us keep front and center in our minds that these demeaning stereotypes are just that. It may feel strange to continually insert words like these, but it's critical to disarming racism in others, and in ourselves.

Sample questions	Potential answers
THE SCARCITY SCRIPT	
1. Goldwater used racial appeals to win votes. Reagan went further. He used racial stories to win votes – and he also used racial stories to turn people against the idea of liberal government. **Let's start with the scarcity script. Can you describe it?**	The scarcity script explains scare resources in this way: 1. Blame government welfare... 2. for going to supposedly undeserving people of color... 3. while supposedly paid for by hardworking White taxpayers
2. How does the "welfare queen" dog whistle work as a scarcity script?	The welfare queen triggers stereotypes of Black people, and Black women in particular, as lazy and larcenous. But the real culprit in the story is liberal government, which supposedly showers the welfare queen with entitlements. The dupe in this myth is the White taxpayer, who is not only supposedly working hard rather than living off of welfare, but is actually paying for welfare benefits for others in the form of taxes

3. What does the scarcity script say about liberal government programs?	It describes liberal programs—the sorts of programs that build the middle class—as wasteful giveaways to undeserving people
4. Have you seen versions of the scarcity script applied to programs beyond welfare?	It's often applied to food stamps. And to healthcare. Obamacare was described as reparations to Black people. Often, undocumented immigrants are accused of getting free healthcare
5. Is there a better explanation for why resources—welfare, food, healthcare, and other necessities—are hard to get?	Yes. Corporations and wealthy individuals not contributing their fair share. For example, Amazon pays no corporate income tax. When Reagan succeeded in convincing many people to reject liberal government, this made it easier for corporations to run government and the economy for themselves

THE THREAT SCRIPT

1. What is the threat script?	The threat script: 1. uses terms that trigger stereotypes of people of color as violent 2. blames government for refusing to control them 3. and presents White people as innocent victims betrayed by government.
2. What sorts of dog whistles are used to trigger this script?	Dog whistles about crime, for instance "law and order," "thugs," "crime victims," and "super predators." Applied in the context of such terms, the threat script faults government for doing more to protect

	criminals than crime victims. Implicitly, the criminals are violent people of color, while innocent Whites are the crime victims
3. Do you think stories about "illegal aliens" can be part of the threat script?	Sure. In this version of the threat script, ● the supposedly violent people of color are immigrants, typically from Latin America. ● liberal government remains the real problem, because it supposedly leaves the borders open, or enacts sanctuary laws ● and, once again White people are presented as innocent and unprotected
4. Can you think of other dog whistle threat stories? **How about stories about "terrorists"? Or about transgender bathrooms?**	(Your group may think of other/additional examples.)
5. Both the scarcity and the threat scripts share a common structure. This is the basic dog whistle story? Can you name its foundational elements?	1. Fear and resent people of color (they're supposedly violent and/or lazy) 2. Hate liberal government (it allegedly coddles people of color with welfare and refuses to control their criminal behavior) 3. Trust the marketplace (when you fear your neighbors and government betrays you, you're on your own, "free" to compete in the marketplace)

Dog whistles mentioned
● Welfare queen
● Criminals
● Crime victims