



## 2.4 Identity Politics

### Key building blocks

Even among progressives, it's common to hear social justice dismissed as mere "identity politics." **In fact, almost everyone comes to politics through identity questions.**

- The three fundamental political questions people ask themselves are: (1) Who am I? (2) Who threatens me? (3) Who are my allies?
- The right is answering these identity questions all the time.
- Because identity matters, messages engaging questions of racial division can perform better with whites than avoiding race entirely.

IDENTITY POLITICS	
1. The Class Left often dismisses racial justice issues as "identity politics." How have you heard this phrase used?	
2. The video says that all politics is identity politics. What are the key identity questions?	Almost all of us organize our political lives around questions of identity: Who am I in this society? Who threatens me? Who are my allies?
3. How do dog whistle politicians exploit identity politics? How does dog whistling answer the key identity questions?  Hint: Can you recall the threat and scarcity scripts?	<p>This is a memory quiz! Video 1.2 reviewed the threat script, the scarcity script, and the basic structure of almost all dog whistle messages.</p> <p>Here it is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fear and resent people of color (they're supposedly violent and/or lazy)</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Hate liberal government (because it allegedly coddles people of color with welfare and refuses to control their criminal behavior).</li> <li>3. Trust the marketplace (when you fear your neighbors and government betrays you, you're on your own, "free" to compete in the marketplace).</li> </ol>
<p>4. A group called Our Minnesota Future tested a colorblind response to a racial fear message, and it lost.</p> <p>Why might this be? Does it help to ask how the colorblind message answers the key identity questions?</p>	<p>The colorblind message implies we share economic concerns and should work together to demand that government work for all of us. In the abstract, this is fine. But the opposition is promoting racial fear all of the time. The colorblind message fails to engage these central questions, i.e. does race make some people threatening or undeserving?</p>
<p>5. The cross-racial solidarity message beat the opposition message, performing much better than the colorblind message.</p> <p>Using the identity questions, why might that be?</p>	<p>The most important point to emphasize is that ignoring race is a losing strategy, while engaging with racial division can be a winning strategy, depending on how it's done.</p> <p>To dig deeper, encourage people to think about how the winning message engaged with the key identity cases and with race. This conversation is the perfect segue to the next level on the Race-Class narrative.</p>

### Dog whistles mentioned

- Criminals
- Illegal aliens
- Sanctuary cities

**Anti-racist protip**

The phrase “identity politics” was coined in 1977 by the Combahee River Collective in their Black Feminist Statement, declaring their commitment to “struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression.” In itself, identity politics refers to the ways in which individuals make political choices to improve their lives based on their own experiences. In its inception, this was used to challenge social hierarchies. In turn, though, this prompted those defending social hierarchies to deny that they, too, were engaged in identity politics, and to instead dismiss identity concerns as inconsequential and unnecessary. This tendency to dismiss identity politics continues on the right, and in some elements of the Class Left.

It’s important to remember where this phrase comes from as we use it in conversation. Part of the race-class praxis is working to understand how seemingly everyday terms can either inspire us to fight for progressive change or dissuade us from joining together. This includes understanding the original meaning, context, and potential of “identity politics.”