Before turning to the main text, a last word seems warranted regarding the awkwardness of so much talk about “whites,” for instance in the ubiquitous references to white voters and a white political party. Partly, there may be a sensitivity to references to whites accentuated by the context, a book that aims to contest racism. Anti-racist efforts have sometimes gone astray in critiquing whites. Yet even when they haven’t done so, repeatedly they have been accused of promoting anti-white prejudice. As a result, today some hear almost any reference to
whites coming from minorities or the political left as betraying a supposed “hate whitey” undercurrent. Also, discussing whites may come across as jarring because it violates an increasingly stringent norm that race should not be discussed openly. This preference for colorblindness, for a public blindness surrounding all things connected to race, holds broad attraction across the political spectrum. Yet conservatives have converted colorblindness into an ideology that facilitates and also protects dog whistling. We cannot assess how appeals to white identity shape modern politics without carefully talking about whites, and also without transgressing—and parsing—colorblindness.

Yet even tempered references to whites may generate discomfort: the term seems to treat as a monolith a group that comprises tens of millions of unique individuals who relate to their racial identity in innumerable, complicated ways. Thus, to be absolutely clear, in repeatedly talking about whites (and nonwhites) in the aggregate, I do not mean to imply a false uniformity that treats all group members as if they hold an identical relationship to race. Like all major social torsions, race influences individuals in myriad ways, some less, some more, some almost not at all. Nevertheless, “white” identity—complex, historically produced, constantly evolving—remains a potent social force, one we can only grapple with by naming and discussing it. In *Dog Whistle Politics*, we are principally concerned with voters who respond to appeals directed to their sense of themselves as white persons. Even as we take care to respect the complicacy of this phenomenon, we can hardly move forward without treating white identity as socially meaningful. “White” in this book serves as a necessary
shorthand for a colossally powerful social entanglement.

A final thought: the constant references to whites stimulated by race-baiting may lead some readers to say, *all this talk about white voters is not about me*. Staunch liberals may feel that since they will never vote Republican, the whites at the center of this book’s analysis are others, not them. They may especially hold this conviction if they already consider themselves wise to the dog whistle game, because this puts them on the outside looking in (and perhaps down) on the victims of the con. With even more certainty that they are not implicated, nonwhites may read these pages as an anthropological tour of unfamiliar others perceived as permanently on the other side of an impassable racial boundary. But as the Preface cautions, this book is about all of us. The pages that follow show that many confirmed liberals, white and nonwhite alike, subscribe to racial ideas that help empower dog whistle politics. Moreover, we will also see that racial pandering is evolving to pull in some minorities. Just as “white” does not denote a monolithic entity, neither does it denote a safely distant essence. The very complexity and dynamism of whiteness ensures that we are all caught to some extent within its morass.