

# DOG-WHISTLE RACISM

Lecturer to speak on race and politics at UO

Racism is a permanent, entrenched feature of American life. That was the thrust of a course taught by Derrick Bell, one of founders of critical race theory, while Ian Haney-López was a student at Harvard.

But Haney-López didn't finish out the term, he says. He butted heads with Bell over an allegorical story called "The Space Traders" in which aliens come to Earth. The story deals with the idea of entrenched racism by asking the question of whether the U.S. would trade African-Americans for gold to pay off the nation's debt, pollution-cleaning chemicals and clean, safe power — essentially selling them into slavery again. "The idea that racism was permanent struck me as excessively simplistic and in some ways more of a political pose than a studied analysis," Haney-López says.

Haney-López didn't come back to Bell's class; however, he will be giving the University of Oregon's inaugural Derrick Bell Lecture at 7 pm Feb. 7, in the Erb Memorial Ballroom on the UO campus. The UO Gospel Choir will perform at 6:45 pm.

"I am a strange person, in a sense, to honor Bell because I was what Bell would describe as a difficult student," Haney-López says.

Bell himself was no stranger to controversy — he left Harvard in 1990, shortly after Haney-López took his course. Bell was protesting the lack of women of color on the law school faculty. Bell, who was later a visiting NYU law professor, had also been a UO law school dean. He left UO when the law school didn't hire an Asian-American woman, who was one of the top three candidates in the search, after the two white male candidates turned the job down, according to his NYU law school faculty profile.

A video of President Obama as a law student in 1991 speaking at a Harvard rally for Bell was unsuccessfully used by the right to try to discredit Obama as "radical" on the issue of race in the 2012 election.

Before Bell died in 2011, Haney-López was invited to give NYU's Derrick Bell Lecture on Race in American Society. Though the two had repaired their once-strained relationship at that point, he says he wanted to use the lecture to explain how "over the course of my career I came to understand what he was saying." Bell passed away two months before the lecture.

"I had really come to understand racism was not permanent in the sense of fixed, but permanent in the sense it was deeply entrenched and adapts," Haney-López says. Haney-López is now a professor at UC Berkeley writing on issues of race and constitutional law.

**'Race is deeply connected to the conservative attack on liberalism.'**

- IAN HANEY-LÓPEZ

By way of example, Haney-López points to an often-cited statistic that by 2045 whites will be a minority, but he says if the definition of white changes to include "Hispanic whites" (Latinos who identify themselves as racially white on

the census) then whites will remain a majority. The Irish, the Jewish and Eastern Europeans are among the many groups who were once seen as non-white and later became white, he says.

The title of Haney-López's lecture, "Dog Whistle Racism: Race and Politics in 2012" refers to when someone is using racism that is barely hidden but is trading on racial stereotypes, Haney-López says, such as when Ronald Reagan spoke of "welfare queens" — he didn't describe them as black but used a coded racial appeal. When the person using the racist language is called out, he can then say he wasn't racist because the racism, while there, was not explicit — there's no Klansman or skinhead yelling an epithet



IAN HANEY-LÓPEZ

as he wields a baseball bat. He points to other examples from the election such as John Sununu calling Obama "lazy" and Sarah Palin referring to Obama's "shuck and jive."

Haney-López says while in the 1960s racism was seen as widespread, these days people have difficulty seeing or admitting to the existence of racism, let alone talking about it.

The Republican Party has made race central to the way it appeals to voters, Haney-López says. "Race is deeply connected to the conservative attack on liberalism." He says that in the last election nine out of 10 people who voted for Romney were white, and 98 percent of state-level Republican elected officials were white. "That's virtually an all-white party. That's difficult to achieve."

He adds, "We have a black president despite the fact he didn't come close to winning the majority of white votes." ■

*lighten*  
BY RAFAEL ALDAVE  
*up*

After sending an embarrassing proposal to the county commissioners, their director of human resources got back a memo, I'm guessing, that read something like this:

"Your proposal to give a double-digit salary increase to the county administrator and to the county counsel — which was reported in the paper just as we were about to hold public hearings on the need for a tax increase — is not helpful. Get on the team, Madilyn. You're not working for Karl Rove ... are you?"

## HAPPENING PEOPLE

BY PAUL NEEVEL

### SISTER MARGARET GRAZIANO

(revisited)

**May 1996:** Although she works 40 hours a week as a counselor at Willamette Family Treatment Services, 79-year-old Sister Margaret Graziano finds time to volunteer at the Lane County Jail, continuing a prison ministry she began in the early 1970s. A former school teacher and Catholic chaplain, Sister Margaret conducts classes in art and "leisure wellness," helping prisoners find a healthy balance of work and play to reduce dependence on drugs and alcohol once they leave jail. Besides teaching, she attends to simple, but vital, needs of inmates, such as picking up mail, cashing checks or arranging emergency housing for family members. Drug-dependent males at Lane County Corrections' Passages residential treatment program are familiar with her gentle ways, as are children at Rainbows Unlimited, a program she developed for youngsters in chemical-dependent families.

**2013 update:** After 37 years of counseling and classes at the jail, Sister Margaret leaves in February for her new assignment at Mary's Woods at Marylhurst, a retirement community in Lake Oswego. At age 95, she recently served on the selection jury for Visions from Within, an exhibit of art by inmates, to be seen in February and March at the library, the airport and DIVA. Her brand new book, *Memoirs of Sister Margaret Graziano*, is available for online viewing at blurb.com

