

Identity Politics?

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We have heard the term "identity politics" a great deal during the last presidential election campaign. Hillary Clinton. in almost every speech, listed the identities of every possible group that needed to be defended against the attacks of Candidate Trump. She and the Democrats would protect Gays, Blacks, Transgendered people, Muslims, women, Hispanics, the deaf, the handicapped, and seniors. This was a demonstration of her care for people who needed protection, government protection if necessary. Historically, since the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Democrats have been concerned with extending rights to those Americans who often suffered either from disdain, neglect, or racism.

Every decade (and even more often), we fill out forms for the government, checking off our identification with one category or another. The list keeps growing. In defense of this sort of categorization, we are now a much more compassionate country. The handicapped enjoy access to buildings formerly barred to them, with ramps in lieu of stairs; every televised speech is accompanied by signing for the hearing impaired; bumps in the street alert the blind; we no longer bar people from public facilities because of their skin color or religion; people of different races may now marry. The list is infinite, and certainly the benefits to those for whom new laws apply live far better lives than ever imagined in human history.

However, even good intentions sometimes have unexpected consequences. In talking about Americans as categories, we forget Americans as a unit. Remember e-pluribus unum? Out of many, one? We are having an identity crisis in our country. Other countries around the world have identities given by bloodline, by geography, by religion, by their history. Our country is held together by an idea: a creed, that says that we are American by virtue of acceptance of constitutional rule of law, separation of powers, and a belief in our culture of decency and self-reliance. Culture (Protestant Ethical values) embraces everyone's behavior, not just being White, male, or Protestant.

Not enough attention has been paid to a far more negative kind of "identity politics" proclaimed by supporters of White Supremacy. Some White Men have long resented the attention paid to everybody on the Identity list with the exception of themselves. They detest the extreme feminists who condemn all men as inherently violent and evil; the Black Lives Matter movement that insinuates that White lives do not matter; and leftist university students who want all the works of "dead white men" stricken from the curriculum. However, despite their fears, White privilege has not vanished, nor is a revolution against the rest of the American population warranted. Threats of violence (armed insurrection), refusal to recognize judges who are not White men, and a general attack on all the Enlightenment values that created our country, cannot be ignored. They are not exempt from rule of law.

The difference between the well-intentioned identity politics of the left and the malevolent identity politics of dictatorial groups is that the former want to make life better and the latter want to use these lists for rounding up and liquidating the "mud-people." Nazis and Communists used such earmarks to liquidate "enemies of the state.")

Although well-intentioned, identity politics can sometimes be silly. An example of this comes from a telephoned interview by a reporter to Ward Connerly in 1997, who opposed collecting ethnic data by the State of California for "affirmative action."

Reporter: What are you?

Connerly: I am an American.

Reporter: No, no, no! What are YOU?

Connerly: Yes, yes, yes. I am an American.

Reporter: That is not what I mean. I was told that you are African American.

Are you ashamed to be African American?

Connerly: No, I am just proud to be an American. My ancestry includes Africans, French, Irish, and American Indian.

Reporter: Then what does this make you?

Connerly: That makes me all-American.

For an important discussion of this issue, being American and not hyphenated-American, I recommend a splendid book: Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity, by Samuel P. Huntington. Values and behavior matter for

survival of the American dream.

683 words

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