

IDENTITY POLITICS

David Selim Sayers

English Levels: B1-C2

Course Content

The Black Lives Matter movement has demonstrated the power of identity politics: united around a set of concerns shaped by a common identity, marginalized groups can make their voices heard in striking ways. But identity politics also has a dark side: adopted by majorities seeking to defend their historical privileges, it can devolve into racism and oppression. Is identity politics a unifying force for a just political struggle, or does it pit communities within the same nation against each other in a zero-sum game?



In this course, we will dive into the history of identity politics from its early manifestations in the hands of black feminists to its recent transmutations by white supremacists. Our historical overview will be accompanied by theoretical writings that seek to make sense of the phenomenon for better or worse. The course will conclude with a transatlantic comparison, assessing the relative relevance of identity politics for the US and for France.

Learning Goals

This course has three main goals: (a) impart in-depth knowledge on the topics of identity politics through readings and in-class instruction, (b) develop critical thinking skills through assignments and in-class discussion, (c) foster English-language skills of oral and written expression and comprehension.

Evaluation

The course grade is based on attendance and participation (40%), homework assignments (30%), and an autonomy project in the form of a research essay (30%).

Sample Reading List

Abrams, Stacey, et al. "E Pluribus Unum? The Fight Over Identity Politics." *Foreign Affairs*

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*.

Eisenstein, Zillah. "The Combahee River Collective Statement"

Fukuyama, Francis. "Against Identity Politics: The New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy." *Foreign Affairs*

Garza, Alicia. "Identity Politics: Friend or Foe?" *belonging.berkeley.edu*

Lilla, Mark. "The dog that didn't bark: The disappearance of the citizen." *Eurozine*

Rowling, J.K. "J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues." www.jkrowling.com

Weekly Plan

Week 1 Introduction

Week 2 Before identity politics

Week 3 Judith Butler: Gender and identity (I)

Week 4 Judith Butler: Gender and identity (II)

Week 5 The Combahee River Collective Statement: intersectional identity

Week 6 Identity politics as a progressive political force

Week 7 Identity politics of the political right

Week 8 Criticisms of identity politics (I): Francis Fukuyama

Week 9 Criticisms of identity politics (II): Mark Lilla

Week 10 Identity politics and the individual

Week 11 Identity politics and the nation

Week 12 Identity politics and citizenship

Week 13 Comparative assessment: identity politics in the US and France

Assessment

Attendance and participation (40%)

- Doing the weekly readings (if assigned)
- Coming to class prepared
- Participating in class discussion

Homework assignments (30%)

- Writing 2-3 brief responses to the weekly readings
- 2-4 paragraphs each, single-spaced, 12-point font

Autonomy project (30%)

- Preparing an essay on identity politics, with a research question of your choice
- Research questions need to be approved by the instructor
- 3-5 pages, single-spaced, 12-point font