Race, Gender & Identity Politics: Are Identity Politics dangerous to our democracy

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For this paper, I'm going to explore the question, is identity politics a danger to our democracy? I've collected reporting and data from three sources; How America's' Identity Politics Went from Inclusion to Division, Amy Chau, The Guardian Magazine; The Battle Over Identity Politics Explained, German Lopez, Vox News Site; #Republic: Divided Democracy in The Age of Social Media, Cass Sunstein.

Over the course of our Media class, we've covered many different issues regarding gender and race and their representation in the media. We've analyzed African Americans, Women, Mexican Americans and how the media covered them during the Zoot Suit Riots here in our own backyard, Los Angeles in the early 1940s and others. Groups of different races and genders have pushed back against discrimination and oppression since the founding of this country to bring about a more just and equitable society. They have served to, " confront rather than obscure the uglier aspects of American history and society,"(4) as stated in German Lopez's, *The Battle Over Identity Politics, Explained.* But have all of these movements served to divide rather than bring together?

In her article, 'How America's Identity Politics Went From Inclusion to Division, Amy Chua explains that these movements were spawned from different groups reacting to years of discrimination and persecution and," when groups feel threatened they retreat into tribalism"; a kind of "group consciousness" (2) develops. "One group's claim to feeling threatened and voiceless are often met by another group's derision because it discounts their own feelings of persecution." (2) As a result, "many on the right have turned away from universalist rhetoric."(2) This creates division. Naturally, a division exists, but Amy Chau goes on to report that the movements of today have lost the spirit of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the message of Dr. Martin Luther King of bringing people together no matter their race or gender. Today, "almost no one is standing up for an America without identity politics, for an American identity that transcends and unites all the country's many subgroups."(2) Now, movements are more exclusive without a goal of national unity but rather group recognition; Politicians have ceased on this to engage in a "politics of recognition" (2) or identity politics. Identity politics are "political positions based on the interests and perspectives of social groups with which people identify." (1)

In 'The Battle Over Identity Politics, Explained', German Lopez maintains that the Republicans won the 2016 election in no small part to identity politics. Trump seized on 'White Identity"(4)

White Identity is, "mobilized around the idea of whites as an endangered, discriminated-against group." (3) Millions of white voters voted for Trump as a repudiation of the Democrat's focus on minority rights over theirs and political correctness. Whether you agree with that assessment or not, it is worth consideration.

Cass Sunstein explores identity politics on a micro level in his book, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in The Age of Social Media*. In the book, Sunstein explains how this form of media not only advocates for these group-conscious movements (which is not necessarily a bad thing) but also contains and controls the viewer in an "echo chamber'(5) and while, "Self-insulation and personalization are solutions to genuine problems, but " he argues, "they also spread falsehoods, and promote polarization and fragmentation. Cass, like German Lopez and Amy Chau, maintains that "self-segregation of like-minded people can make it far more difficult to produce sensible solutions."(5) The information we get from the internet is in large part controlled by algorithms; hashtags are another popular tool to direct browsers to things they prefer. "[Algorithms] will learn a great deal about you and they will know what you want or will like. They will know your emotions and mimic emotions on their own."(5) This further compounds the problem of identity politics and insulation of groups and factions. Never before has there been such a powerful tool of communication and expression. Cass argues that "echo chambers"(5) have caused a paralysis in government; big issues like immigration, climate change, and gun control haven't been able to pass because of polarization.

Movements toward a more free and equitable society are to be commended. What they are doing is, "trying to change how US society and politics talk about and handle...issues to hopefully push the country in a more equal direction." But the articles I have sourced point to a number of problems; we have lost the message of a national unity in place of fragmented group-conscious movements vying for recognition in a zero-sum game and the internet, or chief form of communication is designed, by nature, to fragment and polarize.

Citations:

Lopez, German. "The Battle over Identity Politics, Explained." Vox, Vox, 2 Dec. 2016, www.voxcom/identities/2016/12/2/13718770/identity-politics. (4)

Sustein, Cass. "#Republic." Google Books, 2017, books.google.com/books?id=0VBLDwAAQBAJ. (5)

Chua, Amy. "How America's Identity Politics Went from Inclusion to Division." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 1 Mar. 2018, (2) www.theguardian.com/society/2018/mar/01/how-americas-identity-politics-went-from-inclusion-to-division.

(3) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identity_politics (1)