

Transcription

Exploring how we can master ourselves by looking at how experts say it is possible with your host Suswati Basu.

Intro music

Welcome to season 2 episode 62 of How To Be...with me Suswati as your timid presenter, guiding you through life's tricky topics and skills by reading through the best books out there.

Hey, before we get to this week's episode, we wanted to take a moment to address the Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe versus Wade on June 24th, 2022. Everyone should have the freedom to decide what is best for themselves and their families, including when it comes to ending a pregnancy. Abortion is a basic healthcare need for millions of people of all genders, and this decision has far-reaching consequences for every single person in America. People, not politicians, should be able to make their own decisions including when it comes to abortion care. We have more information linked at choice.crd.co, and if you are able, consider donating to abortion funds. Please speak up, take care, and spread the word.

Identity politics is a controversial term these days. The dictionary definition says it is a tendency for people of a particular religion, race, social background, etc., to form exclusive political alliances, moving away from traditional broad-based party politics.

The dramatic rise of identity politics in mainstream politics is often regarded as both a cause and effect of the rise of populism across the globe. According to The Guardian, "when groups feel threatened, they retreat into tribalism", causing groups of people to become "more defensive, more punitive, more us-versus-them".

However, The Independent newspaper says that describing movements as identity politics is effectively a "trap" as it is "easy to declare all politics identity politics, because everything relates to our identity". And it also depends on who is claiming the term is problematic.

So why is identity politics important?

Our first book is from Gary Younge, who is an award-winning author, broadcaster and a professor of sociology at the University of Manchester. His 2016 book, *Another Day in the Death of America*, won the J. Anthony Lukas Prize, from Columbia University and the Nieman Foundation. In 2009 he won the James Cameron award for the "combined moral vision and professional integrity" of his coverage of the Obama campaign.

Formerly a columnist and US correspondent for the Guardian, he has also written for the New York Review of Books, Granta, the Financial Times, GQ and the New Statesman. *Who Are We -- And Should It Matter in the 21st Century?* was originally published in 2010, but has a new introduction in the 2020 version. I was incredibly fortunate enough to speak to Professor Younge

so here is a snippet but find the full interview on www.howtobe247.com or on the YouTube channel.

GARY YOUNGE: I don't know that I thought 2010 was the right time to write the book, as opposed to I've been thinking about these things for a while. It felt urgent. Then in a way. We were seven years from the Iraq war starting. We were in the middle of a kind of real feverish state about Muslim and British values and all of that. We just had this huge economic crisis. And it felt then in a range of ways, like the identity in a range of ways was at the forefront of what we were talking about. There would be these peculiar things where in Britain people would say, with regard to religion, we are a secular country. I'd say, well, we're not actually. We have an established church. We're actually the opposite of a secular country. But I also knew what they meant, which was compared to, say, America or Pakistan, we are not a particularly overtly religious country. But the way that they were describing themselves was, in fact, wrong. Where they would talk about kind of how arranged marriages were not British, the royal family, pretty much most 19th century novels. I mean, that is the end of it for Bronte and for Trollope. So there was a sense of like that. There was an urgent discussion that had to be had, not just in Britain, but elsewhere, about how we understood identity. And this was a contribution to it. And my basic idea was identity is an essential place to start. We all have one. We all have many, actually, but a terrible place to finish in any argument that when it finishes there, then you end up with fundamentalism, which could be fundamentalism of nation, of religion, of gender, and in essentialism. But every argument starts from a place. And that place is a culmination of what you think about your experiences. So it would be weird to believe that if I was born a girl in 16th century India that I would have the same worldview as I do now. The world impacts our understanding of how we understand the place. And so that has to be factored in. I think the more powerful an identity is, the less it is interrogated. So nobody ever asked me, when did you realize you were straight? Straight people never get asked that question. Nobody ever asked me, as a foreign correspondent, how did you balance that with child care? Because men don't get asked that question. And then literally, in terms of questions, if you're traveling on a British or American passport, usually people don't say, when are you going home? There's an understanding that you're going to be okay. Whereas if you're traveling on a Ugandan passport or passport from a poorer country, then there's a whole lot of paperwork and a whole lot of suspicion. So there are a range of questions that the powerful are never asked. And indeed, the more powerful you are, the less likely you are to even think you have an identity. So white people don't think of themselves as white people. They just think of themselves as people. And everybody else is a subgenre of people men don't think about, like, well, will it be difficult for me to do that as a man to go there or to be in this place at this time? Because the general feeling is that, broadly speaking, with Caveats, as a man, you will usually be safe. You'll usually be okay. Yeah. The more powerful identity is, the less likely it is to be interrogated, and the more likely the people that have them are to assume that it's just the norm. Which is why, if you look at the kind of Commentaria which is dominated by not just white people and overwhelmingly men, but like, posh white people like classes and identity, too. And these people have a lot of money, and they've grown up thinking that they were going to run the world. And so, um, they think that their ideas are not a product of the world that they grew up in. They think it's a product of their genius. Things soon fall apart when you say, okay, hands up anyone in this room who was

everyone's preschool dinners or who has a relative who had an immigration problem or struggled because of Windrush. So now what you don't want to do is fetishize those experiences to the extent there and this is what I mean by it's a good place to start, a terrible place to finish, is to say, my cousin had problems during Windrush, and therefore you can't argue with me, or, I'm a black man. You can't argue with me. I had free school dinners. Your experience is not an argument, but it does inform your argument. Yeah, it's a good question. And when I wrote the book the first time, intersectionality wasn't like the rigor. People were like, I'm not old. The issue was it's not like I've been in the issue, but the term which is used regularly now was not used regularly then. I think that people have very binary understandings of how these things work. And so whenever anything comes up which is not exactly complicated, it just takes a little bit of imagination, like, okay, so you're black and you're Nigerian, but you're rich, or you're black and you're male, but you're gay and you're rich, or whatever. People are kind of like staying in a I can only deal with one thing at a time, and that we are, at one and the same time, one thing which is ourselves. And then we are many things. I think that people, particularly powerful people, like to reduce you to one thing, which was weird in the Obama Hillary campaign, where people say, what will black people do? How will black people vote? And how will women vote? And the idea that there was this category called black women who weren't just black sometimes and women sometimes, but were black women the whole time had just never occurred to them. And funnily enough, black women were not thinking, oh, my God, I've been rent apart by these two things that in this particular moment, they considered Obama something that they might go for. They appreciated the fact that he was standing against a woman, but that wasn't where their emphasis lay by any manner of means. Could have gone the other way. But black women are very used to voting for white men. That's not an issue. Nobody says, how are they going to deal with that? It's a very weird thing. And that kind of the more you get groups like that where people say, well, black people are very homophobic, and you think, well, the gay ones aren't. Let's start with them. Where are your stats for that? Once you get into intersectionality, the crudity and the essentialism kind of really, um, falls apart. What I should have said in the beginning, I do think it's interesting because the book was written in 2010 when things seemed pretty wild identity wise. But then there was Brexit, there was Trump, there was the rise of white nationalism. We don't talk about Islamic fundamentalism as much as we used to. There was windrush. And so that was the thinking behind bringing out again with the new introduction was not kind of, you were right, and you're going to need to catch up. But it's like, actually, your book feels even more relevant and urgent now than it did when it came out. And the things that you were describing are, in some ways more evident now than they were before. Let's bring it up to date a little bit.

(Back to host)

Younge's new introduction addresses the fundamental changes following the 2016 election of Donald Trump as US President. He says his appeal to racism and nativism apparently supersedes religious attachment despite white evangelists supporting him, which means race plays no small part.

As a result, Younger says identity is like fire. It can create warmth and comfort, or burn badly and destroy. Identity is at the forefront of some of the most inspiring achievements in world political history, whether it is the suffragettes, the end of apartheid or the advances in gay rights. But it has also taken centre stage at the most lurid moments of global affairs – the Holocaust, and the conflicts of Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, Congo, Syria and Myanmar. Whilst it can make connections, it can also sow division among those who live side by side.

The author writes that the 'other' is rarely as foreign or as threatening as we are led to believe. The overlap between those terrorists who attach themselves to Islam and those who embrace white supremacy is such that one British neo-Nazi group called for a 'white jihad'. Both currents primarily attract young men brimming with rage and brooding resentment in pursuit of moral certainty, doctrinal purity and a desire to make their mark on a world in which they feel increasingly superfluous and disoriented.

For example, in a maximum-security prison in Colorado, Timothy McVeigh, who blew up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168 people, was in an adjacent cell to Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, who tried to blow up the World Trade Center in 1993. McVeigh was, among other things, a white supremacist; Yousef was, among other things, an Islamic fundamentalist who trained in Al-Qaeda camps. Born within four days of each other, they were both unrepentant about their crimes and wedded to their ideologies. They became best friends. Sometime after McVeigh was executed in 2001, Yousef said: 'I have never [known] anyone in my life who has so similar a personality to my own as his.'

This is the vexed terrain this book seeks to explore: to what extent can our various identities be mobilized to accentuate our universal humanity as opposed to separating us off into various antagonistic camps?

Younger says that identity stands at the core of political activity is not a new idea. But until relatively recently, in the West, it was mitigated by the understanding that the interests of various groups could be filtered through democratic activity and would be underpinned by human rights. Elected majorities were supposed to rule while minorities were supposed to have protection. That, at least, was the promise and the model. But the escalation of neo-liberal globalization has eroded the very relevance of the basic unit of democracy – the nation state – and in so doing disabled the levers previously available to assert our collective will on the world.

In the absence of any meaningful way to advance their interests as citizens, many retreat into their collectives of place, race, religion, and so on, as a means of self-defence.

But while identity is a crucial place to start, it is a terrible place to finish. As a prism, it is both essential and deeply flawed. None of the identities that we generally work with are even remotely as definite as commonly believed.

Each section is galvanizing a different audience for a different reason. But the central appeal of each is that whatever it is that makes them different – being American, Muslim, British or black –

does not simply occupy its own discrete human space but instead stands both apart from and above humanity altogether.

'Identity politics' – which after a while began to mean whatever you wanted it to mean so long as you didn't like it – was blamed for having created an atomized, sectarian culture on the Left that had simultaneously elevated individuals who traded on guilt while relegating the possibilities for real solidarity and electoral victory.

And as the hostility increases against Muslims specifically, so does the currency of fundamentalists, who are given the opportunity to present themselves as the staunch defenders not of dogma but of community. The number of rightwing extremists arrested in Europe almost doubled between 2016 and 2017.

However, alienating poor white people with cavalier rhetoric does not help anybody, but pandering to popular prejudice doesn't either. Trump's racism did not benefit poor white people. Working-class white Americans' life expectancy has been falling due to 'deaths of despair'.

So while it might be true that the powerful can exploit difference in order to divide the powerless and thereby strengthen their grip, it is no less true that the powerful did not invent difference and oftentimes need do little to keep it alive.

Younge adds identity politics has proved far more adept at raising consciousness than at passing laws, forming governments or embedding that new awareness effectively into electoral politics.

At present, the space stands publicly derided and hypocritically exploited by the Right; wilfully neglected or carelessly promoted by the Left; and shamelessly marketized by the corporate world.

The question is not whether we all have identities, but whether we are all prepared to recognize them. When former US President Barack Obama nominated Sonia Sotomayor to the US Supreme Court, conservatives returned to it with avid interest. From all the judgements, speeches and rulings she had made in her life, for the most part, they focused on just the one sentence about the relative merits of being a 'wise Latina'. Wisdom is not shaped by gender or ethnicity. She was evoking an identity with which they had little sympathy, towards ends with which they did not agree.

The underlying assumption of the conservatives on the judiciary committee was that, while Sotomayor had to negotiate her gender and ethnicity in order to reach an objective decision, being a Caucasian male is an objective position in itself: not an identity but an orthodoxy.

Although we all have several identities, not all those identities are political, even if most have the potential to become so. When cast as 'personal', issues such as abortion, domestic violence, childcare responsibilities and housework were effectively excluded from broader political

discussion, leaving women isolated in their attempts to seek equality, safety and greater freedom. By reframing them as political, feminists opened up fresh terrain, which would also prove particularly fertile for environmentalists. In reality, the distinction between the personal and the political is blurred, fluid and important.

And the term 'reverse racism' is part of a growing attempt by the Right to reclaim victimhood for the powerful through the worst methods of identity politics, which they so freely and routinely scorn. Every victim needs an aggressor. And in the event that an aggressor does not exist, one must be invented.

Consequently the right-wing media blames the media. In the US, they blame Hollywood; in the UK, they blame the BBC. Paradoxically, they particularly blame them for creating a grievance culture where people blame other people for what is happening to them.

In the space of one month in 2006 for example, the term 'political correctness' was used in the British press on average ten times a day – twice as frequently as 'Islamophobia', three times as often as 'homophobia' and four times as often as 'sexism'. So political correctness simply becomes a coded shorthand for an attack on equality and civility.

But values change, societies develop and their language and behaviour evolve with them such as inappropriate banter and jokes. That's not political correctness but social and political progress. It was not imposed by liberal diktat but established by civic consensus.

At root, all identities are created by us to make sense of the world we live in. That doesn't mean that there are no differences between people. And anybody has the right to challenge these identities (indeed that is how they evolve and develop), but nobody has the right to tell someone else that they are something they have no interest in being. There is no such thing as authenticity, but there are plenty of people trying to enforce it which Younge calls gatekeepers ie. People who believe they have a right to police identities.

This can be seen in a 2007 UK Home Office study, where they basically admitted that they have learned to 'no longer... ask a well-travelled American businessman how much money he has brought with him or for details of his bank balance'. For some [immigration officers], the report concluded, 'credibility is essentially a matter of economics.'

The trouble is, the threshold keeps on changing. The gatekeepers adjust their rules of entry according to the political, economic and social demands of their time, even as they insist they are authenticating a timeless truth. The only certain thing about any identity is that it will keep on changing through natural evolution.

But that is how gatekeepers gain their legitimacy: by offering the false promise that they can not only control the way things evolve but stop them evolving altogether. It is also why they ultimately fail.

Given that identities are always in flux, those who insist that they are in fact static must perform three interconnected solipsistic manoeuvres. First, they must distort their history – for if something is essentially unchanging, then it must be the same now as it ever was. Second, they must quash all speculation about their future – for if it doesn't change, then it can never be different. The third manoeuvre is to ignore all the other changes that happen.

Younge also says we each have several identities that can be compared but not ranked. He uses the example of Black women voters' choices between Obama and Hillary Clinton during the 2008 election. One identity does not supercede the other, but assumptions were made that Black women would have a challenge deciding between the two, without considering that they may make their decision based on policy and not identity. The fact that at any given moment one identity may be stressed more than others does not mean that the others cease to exist.

These kind of zero-sum arguments are entirely wrongheaded on both sides, for three reasons. First, they treat identities as monolithic and interchangeable which they are not. Second, there is a presupposition of a definitive league table whereby the 'equality' of some is subordinated to the 'equality' of others. Third, pitting under-represented groups against each other undermines any potential for building the kind of coalitions necessary to eradicate the discrimination that gives these very identities progressive potential in the first place.

Identities also make no sense unless understood within the context of power. To try to understand the role of identities outside of their power relationships is to misunderstand them completely. A good example is when Swedish newspaper Jyllands-Posten, decided to post cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. The newspaper had actually refused to print pictures of a depiction of the resurrection of Christ a year earlier out of fear that it would provoke an outcry.

So long as the global means the erosion of democracy, the local will mean the elevation of identity. Feeling under threat from a large world whose politics and economics we are unable to control, many resort instead to the defence of 'culture', the one thing people think they have a grip on. In short, they retreat into identities.

We all have a duty to help create the 'safe spaces' for people to both engage in self-criticism and accept criticism from others. But we have no less a duty to engage in an honest and open manner that makes such difficult discussions possible.

The final book is from internationally renowned academic and Stanford University professor Francis Fukuyama with *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*. Here he is speaking at the Radboud Reflects lecture at the University of Radboud in the Netherlands.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: What is identity? First of all, my definition of identity you don't have to accept it, but my definition is very broad because I think that identity pervades the way that we think about many issues in politics. And I'll give you some examples of it. I think that identity is based on a universal human psychological characteristic which the philosopher Plato labeled

the most. Thymos is a Greek word. In English. It's often translated as spiritedness or pride. It refers to the fact that human beings want to be respected. They believe that they've got a certain inner sense of dignity or worth and they want other people to recognize that worth and they become very angry if they don't receive that recognition. And so it's a completely intersubjective relationship and it's different from the things that the economists say drive us. The economists say, Okay, we have what they call preferences or desires for material wellbeing. And there's rationality by which we calculate. And that's it. That's it for the economist that those two things together can explain the whole of human behavior. The problem is that I think there's a lot that can't be explained by that model that has to do with this feeling of resentment that comes from, um, being disparaged or being denigrated. And you see this, actually in the debates that we've been experiencing over populism. So, for example, many of the voters the Brexit voters in Britain when they were asked why they would vote for something that was likely to lead to an economic catastrophe for England loss of jobs, companies moving out of Britain a lot of them said if we have to suffer this way, fine. We will accept that as long as we can keep foreigners out, as long as we can keep our national identity from being undermined by this influx of immigrants. And that's an example, I think, of an identity issue taking precedence over an economic one. There's a universal desire to be recognized particularly to be recognized as equal. And in a sense, it is part of modern democracy. I think there's a special modern form of this universal desire, which I would date, actually, from the Protestant Reformation, which says that we all have an inner being that is different from our outer cells. Our outer cells are defined by other people: our families, our neighbors, our colleagues, people that live in fellow citizens. But we have an authentic inner self. And what Luther said was that God sees only the inner person, only the inner believer. The core of the Christian faith was not conformity to the rituals of the Catholic Church, saying the rosary, going to Mass. It was an inner faith that only God could see and that that inner faith was more important than all of the external laws and rituals of the Church. The Church could crumble and disappear, and it wouldn't make any difference for the Christian faith because the Christian faith was something interior. And I think that this idea that what has worth is what's inside us then in subsequent European thought gets secularized, um, and made general. So I would say the two thinkers that were critical in this were Emmanuel Kant, who held that what made human beings of infinite value was their capacity for moral choice, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, who said that the historical process is what has suppressed our inner self that is authentic and makes us behave in false ways that ultimately lead to our unhappiness. And so the goal of life that would make our lives fulfilled is to liberate that inner self from all of the external constraints that society that a phony or a false society imposes on us. And that, I think, has been the structure of a lot of identity movements over time.

(Back to host)

Fukuyama says there is an increasing tendency for groups of people to form alliances based on shared traits, like gender, religion or sexual orientation. But while we should be proud of our identities, they can also divide us.

He begins by saying human beings crave positive judgements about their dignity and worth. This truth was known as far back as ancient Greece, whose scholars believed that we all crave

positive judgments about our worth and dignity. The philosopher Socrates even argued that this was a distinct part of our souls: thymos.

Investigating human nature, Socrates identified three parts of the human soul. The first centers around our primitive desires, such as thirst or hunger. The second is more rational – like the voice that tells us to avoid rotten meat even when we're hungry. But independent of these is a third part, thymos, which yearns for dignity and recognition from other people.

If we receive these positive judgments from our community, we become proud and happy. If we don't, we feel angry about being undervalued, or ashamed at not living up to others' expectations.

And thymos is crucial to understanding today's identity politics – a tendency for people to form political alliances based on membership in a particular group. Identity politics is rooted in thymos, because it revolves around a particular group's fight for dignity and recognition.

Fukuyama says our modern concept of identity is tied to individualism. In fact, our current understanding of identity has its roots over the last five centuries. This is a philosophical principle that spotlights the "inner self" within each of us. As mentioned by the political scientist himself before, Jean Jacques Rousseau created a secularised version of Luther's doctrines. He argued that the internal self exists independent of external society, and saw the outside world as a web of rules and traditions that hamper the growth of inner happiness and potential.

The emphasis that Rousseau placed on our inner selves over society's conventions was a crucial step toward modern views about identity.

But these two thinkers were not abstractly theorizing with their heads in the clouds. They were very much products of their times – times of great material change. The growth of individualism was connected to the process of European modernization – a series of social and economic changes that continue to this day.

Combined with Luther's Reformation, modernization gave ordinary people an unprecedented amount of choice and opportunity in their lives. No wonder, then, that this environment saw the birth of individualism.

And the French Revolution kick started two basic forms of identity politics. The first relates back to the rise of individualism. The Revolution took up this individualism, merged it with the belief that individuals have a right to freedom and equality, and began to apply it to the political arena. That's because this uprising, with its demands for liberty, equality and fraternity, demanded that the elite classes officially recognize the basic dignity of ordinary people.

The effect of this can be seen today, in the world's liberal democracies. These states are based on the principles of freedom and equality, which we regard as essential to human dignity.

Everyone has the right to take part in government, and everyone is equal before the law – discrimination based on gender, race or class is illegal.

The second type of identity politics stemming from the Revolution was a demand that the dignity of collective groups be recognized. The problem with radical individualism Fukuyama says is that it erodes shared values and undermines social cooperation. If societies cannot agree on a basic common culture, they cease to function effectively. Communities break down; everyone becomes self-serving and protective of his or her own interests. To rectify this, people search for common identities that will unite the self with society.

And nationalism itself is a form of identity politics. One German philosopher in particular was crucial in shifting the struggle for recognition toward collective groups based on national and cultural traits: Johann Gottfried Herder.

Although Herder asserted there was one human species, and condemned authors who argued that certain races were superior to others, he did believe every community is unique. His writings state that geography has heavily influenced the culture and traditions of different groups – each one expressing its own genius depending on its surroundings.

Unfortunately, Herder's argument has historically been hijacked by more extreme thinkers.

It was Herder's thinking that encouraged nationalism – a belief that political borders should enclose cultural communities that share the same language. In itself, this is not particularly problematic. But nationalist sentiment allowed persuasive orators, like Hitler and Mussolini, to sweep to power, appealing to a vision of a “true” Germany or Italy in order to commit atrocities.

After all modern liberal states are now responsible for the self-esteem of their citizens. In fact, since the end of World War II, modern liberal democracies in Europe and North America have undergone a “therapeutic turn.”

The therapeutic turn came about because of our modern concept of identity. We've seen how Rousseau argued that we all have deep internal spaces within us, and that society holds us back from realizing our full potential. In current liberal democracies, states are charged with helping us discover these inner spaces by increasing our self-esteem and supporting our mental health. And self esteem is intimately related to public recognition.

Because governments are able to grant public recognition through the ways in which they talk about and treat their citizens, they began to use this tactic to raise the self-esteem of groups of citizens.

And in the 1960s, there was a growth in social movements demanding recognition for marginalised groups. Up until then, people mostly thought of their identities as individual. WWII was still vivid in many people's memories and nationalism as a collective identity was feared and reviled.

This changed in the cultural decade, which brought new forms of group identity into the mainstream. People began to view their value and dignity as inseparable from the different groups to which they belonged. Because of this, a host of different social movements sprang up, like the civil and gay rights movements. Each represented a group that had traditionally been marginalized or suppressed.

Within these movements, two approaches became common. Either members could demand to be treated identically to society's dominant groups, or they could promote separate identities and demand respect for their uniqueness. Over time, the second approach became the norm.

Fukuyama says identity politics has fractured the political left. During the 1990s, left-wing political parties began to shift toward the center and became more market-oriented. At the same time, support for left-wing politics began to decline – in Southern Europe, total votes for center-left parties fell from 36 percent in 1993 to 21 percent in 2017.

In the same period, inequality within many countries has skyrocketed. One 2016 report by the United States' Congressional Budget Office found that in 1989, the top 10 percent of wealthiest families in the country owned 67 percent of all US wealth; by 2013, this had increased to 76 percent. This is also true in European countries: all EU member states have become richer in the last 30 years, but this new wealth has ended up in the hands of the super wealthy.

The left's attention has been partly fragmented among competing interest groups. For example, Fukuyama says activists are now preoccupied with certain marginalised issues. And while these are crucial concerns, identity politics divides oppressed groups into small units, each with its own distinct interests. No longer is the left a broad movement that wants to help the 90 percent: identity politics has pulled the rug out from under a coalition that could challenge wider causes of wealth and social inequality.

If we want to see large-scale change in our societies, change that benefits the neediest, we should build inclusive collectives that everyone can rally behind. The working class, for example, includes men and women, gay and straight people, and racial minorities and majorities.

But Fukuyama is not saying we should abandon identity. Instead we need to create larger, more inclusive conceptions of it. He says most fundamentally, national identity should be about a shared belief in a country's political system and moral values, which can be based on liberal, democratic principles and a commitment to universal human rights.

First, it has clear security benefits. Weak national identities bring about severe security issues, because highly divided countries are vulnerable and prone to inner conflicts.

Second, firm national identities increase the effectiveness of our governments. In corrupt nations, many politicians divert state resources away from the public and toward their own

families, ethnic groups or political parties. But strong national identities make this less likely – if politicians identify with the wider community and their collective well-being, they won't be as inclined to line their pockets.

Third, national identities have clear economic benefits. For example, if public servants are not proud of their country, they will be less motivated to work for its success.

Finally, a potent national identity builds trust. This is an essential element for healthy states, because trust is the basis of economic exchange, and it also encourages social cohesion. Strong identities based on small groups decrease trust among different groups, making conflict even more likely.

In the end, we can use policies to build strong national identities and reduce social tensions. First and most obviously, we need to eliminate gender, racial and religious discrimination. Just because identity politics has negative effects for political action doesn't mean these groups' grievances are not legitimate. If we can stamp out things like police violence against minorities and sexual harassment in workplaces, activists campaigning for the recognition of their group's dignity will be able to be slotted into a campaign for an inclusive national identity.

Identity can be used to divide, but it can and has also been used to integrate. That in the end will be the remedy for the populist politics of the present.

So to sum up:

Younge says in *Who Are We* that identity is not seeking a role in politics or in our lives. It is already there. For better, for worse and usually for both, it is an integral part of how we relate to people as individuals and as groups. The choice is whether we want to succumb to its perils amidst moral panic and division or leverage its potential through solidarity in search of common, and higher, ground.

Fukuyama says in *Identity* that identity is part of a fundamental human desire to be positively recognized and valued. But while today's identity politics confronts some very real issues in our societies, it can also be used to divide us, categorizing us into small units at odds with one another. In order to enact change and construct healthy and effective democracies, we need to rethink our concept of identity and promote broad collectives of people with shared interests.

Identity politics has both its good and bad sides depending on how it is used, and who is making the call. We hear a lot of terms like woke, political correctness and cancel culture but we need to remember it within the social context. Please join in on the conversation by following @howtobe247 on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, and subscribe on the podcast, which can be found via www.howtobe247.com.

Please do leave a review if you found this helpful! Thank you to Otis Willis, for your lovely comments saying it is "a great podcast."

See you in two week's time!