

# Identity Summary

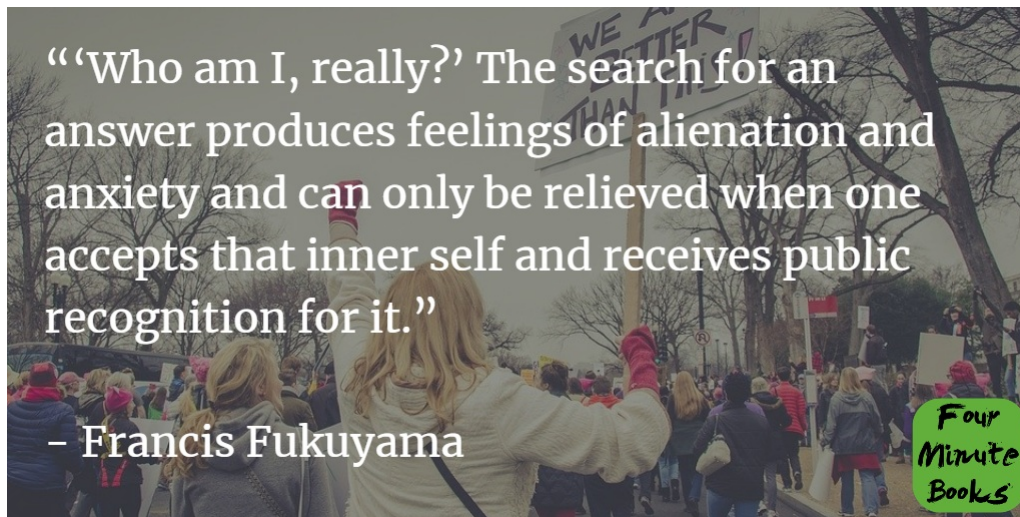
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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Identity* explains the evolution of identity politics and how they lead the way to deep political divisions, giving suggestions about what we can do to alleviate this ever-growing problem.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



As human beings, the need to fit in runs deep. Throughout history, forming into groups was essential to survival. Today, we still love to sort ourselves into groups with a common goal. When these groups are with people who share traits with us like gender, sexual orientation, political party, or religion, this is called identity politics. Groups like these have seen a surge in recent times, and though we should be proud of our identities, they have a tendency to divide us as people.

In *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, Francis Fukuyama explores the evolution of identity and explains the problems with identifying only with those like us. He explains we have forgotten the importance of sharing national beliefs, and now more than ever we need to find a way to have an identity that supports our democracy instead of undermining it.

Here 3 great takeaways from this book:

1. We long for dignity and people to recognize our worth.
2. The political left has been fractured by the rise of identity politics and is giving way to nationalism.

3. We can help lessen the divide by creating more inclusive identity groups.

Are you ready to dive into why our politics have become so divisive, and learn what we can do about it?

## Lesson 1: As humans, we crave dignity and recognition from others.

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Remember the first time you got a certificate or medal for something? Maybe it was for sports, dancing, or a spelling bee. Do you remember how amazing you felt? Even as adults, we crave for recognition. It's a natural part of being human, and even back in Ancient Greece, Socrates had a name for it: thymos. Thymos was a distinct part of our souls that longed for positive judgments from others about our dignity and worth.

**If we receive positive judgments about our worth from the people around us, it makes us feel happy and valued. When we don't, it can make us feel undervalued or ashamed.** Thymos is important in understanding identity politics because it has to do with particular groups fighting for recognition. An example of this is in the gay marriage movement.

Before gay marriage became legal in the United States, gay people could enter into civil unions. These civil unions gave them the same legal and economic advantages of a married couple. So if they had the same rights, why did they fight for marriage? It comes down to thymos. They didn't want their bond to be considered different than heterosexual marriage, and they wanted the same dignity. So they came together and didn't stop until they achieved an equal status from the government.

## Lesson 2: Identity politics have fractured the left and are contributing to a rise in nationalism.

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Dividing and conquering was an effective military strategy used by the British Empire when they were trying to colonize. They would encourage divisions internally within the colony to suppress resistance. The problem with identity politics in today's world is that we get a similar effect. It has splintered the political left in recent times.

In the twentieth century, the left fought for class issues and equality. They were concerned with welfare and economic equality. In the 1990s, left-wing politics began to shift toward the center, to be more market-oriented, and they lost support. The decline of a left concerned with economic equality coincided with the rise of wealth inequality. And that inequality is worse than ever today.

Instead of returning to broad equality, the political left we have today is split into too many groups, all competing for attention. Though things like race issues and LGBTQ rights are crucial still, these small groups have fragmented the left. **Where left-wing politics used to fight for the 90 percent who wanted income equality, Fukuyama argues their identity politics hinder them from being able to help with the broader reasons for the inequality.**

## Lesson 3: If we make more inclusive groups, we can improve the polarized situation of politics today.

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Okay, so everyone fighting for their own individual identity is making us all more polarized. But we can't be expected to give up our identities, right?

Fukuyama argues it's not about giving up your identity, it's about making your identity more *inclusive*. One idea he gives for this is by reinforcing national identities. **Rather than making identities of race, gender or religion, we need a shared belief in a country's morals, political system, and a commitment to human rights.** This provides safety benefits because the country would be less prone to inner conflicts, makes for more effective governments, and facilitates trust, which is essential for unity.

He goes on to present ways we can create and reinforce national identity. First is starting by eliminating discrimination, which leads to identity politics. He also recommends that immigrants should be required to be more committed to integration into a new country, by learning the language and knowing about the values. The people should also be welcoming to immigrants and help them find opportunities. Other recommendations include secularization of schools and a year or two of required national service.

## Identity Review

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I really enjoyed how Identity brings to light the reasons behind so much of the political mess we have today. There is a great fusion of philosophy, political science, and it's easy to follow but occasionally dry. If you're like me, you'll find yourself coming to the realization that his ideas explain so much about why everything in our world suddenly seems so polarized. Though it comes off a bit pessimistic, it does give a welcome sense of urgency to fix the state of things today.

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## Who would I recommend the Identity summary to?

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The 26-year-old who is curious about why the political left is struggling recently, the 30-year-old who enjoys philosophy and history, anyone who is wondering what the heck is going on with politics in the world right now.