

## Identity Politics as a Political Tool

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*Abstract:* Carlson considers their mixed media project that reflects identity politics and the ways in which identity is used as a political tool.

*Keywords:* identity politics, intersectional conflict analysis, art, arts approaches to conflict, Agnes Scott College

### **Creative Statement**

My creative project is on how identity politics is used as a tool. I have utilized many different media for this project, including acrylic paint, textiles, watercolor, paper, clay, and metal. To break the elements down on the canvas, first I will start with the most noticeable feature, the fist holding a scale. When molding this portion, I thought of the fist as the United States. It is holding a balance that is tipped in favor of politics over identity. It is tipped in favor of the white majority over marginalized people, of identity-based groups over unity. The fist gripping the scale is breaking through the identities, that have been created through watercolor on paper. Surrounding this, these bits of paper struggle and fight to tip the scale and change the balance in the other direction. These bits of paper can be seen as queer, racial, gender, militaristic, national, and other identities. The use of the blue and red fabrics framing the canvas is a reference to the structure of U.S. society that identity politics is working within. I also reference the democratic and republican contests within the country.

Though identity can serve as a source of pride and personal empowerment, when it comes to politics, identity can be used as a subject of contention and division. The current political climate has heightened tensions around the issues of identity sparking debates over rights of many marginalized and gendered groups. I want to understand why identities are being used as a tool and to what extent the US political sphere has used identities to form some type of agenda. Is personal identity a true threat to social cohesion and national identity? I chose this topic to understand the term “identity politics” in a more comprehensive manner. I have heard the term thrown out many times over the years, especially after the 2016 elections, and I want to understand the baggage that comes with mixing identity and politics. I am interested to explore how identity politics is used as a political tool? Can we see examples of this tool being employed? When did identity politics really become an important element with the American political sphere? I hope to learn more about the character of U.S. domestic politics since identity politics became a point of contention for policy makers and candidates.



*Figure 1: Mixed media. Created by Emily Carlson.*

Identity politics has come about after a huge shift in American views of identity-based liberation movements from conforming to now challenging democratic institutions. Identity politics have existed as a tool and phenomenon for years as it has included a range of political and social

objectives, including the recognition and empowerment of marginalized groups, the mobilization of social movements, and the manipulation of public opinion for electoral purposes. However, the public discontent with identity politics comes from that challenge to democratic institutions and the apparent “threat” to popular political values. By analyzing the different ways in which identity politics is used as a tool, this project hopes to explore the dynamics of identity-based struggles and their impact on the US political landscape. Some of the themes I have explored in the work include women’s invisibility and gender subordination in international politics, the interconnectedness or overlapping of social categorizations, unfreedom and freedom understood as self-determination and the hierarchical structures that lead to unequal allocation of resources. While working on the creation of my piece, I also considered politics as a process of social-self production through social relations and individuals as social agents that both produce and are products of history. We learn from what has happened and construct new life out of what we have directly encountered from the past and current structures.

## References

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