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Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "I vs We" and Identity Politics

Robin Mizrahi

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"There is a phrase in the opening to the preamble of the US constitution: 'We, the people,'" Sacks said. "The team is bigger than the player, and the game is bigger than the team." But in the U.S. the switch to "I vs We" has caused it to lose "a sense of what binds us together as a nation."

The world lost a brilliant thinker when **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks** died of cancer late last year. He was chief rabbi of the UK and Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013; Prince Charles called him "a light unto this nation," and Tony Blair said he was "an intellectual giant." He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth—hence his stately title.

Sacks was also a historian, professor, and writer. In his **final book**, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, he wrote of the current trend of cancel culture silencing and punishing people who don't think "correctly," and how it goes hand in hand with identity politics to weaken society.

Sacks **explained** that cancel culture comes from people speaking only to the like-minded and demonizing those who think otherwise. That segregation is the main element of identity politics, which break down society into smaller and smaller segments, with each group promoting its own interests before those of the community at large.

On Tim Ferriss' podcast last summer, Sacks **explained** that this trend to divide Americans into subdivisions based on race, religion, sexual and gender identities, etc, has brought about the mentality of "I versus We."

"There is a phrase in the opening to the preamble of the US constitution: 'We, the people,'" **Sacks said**. "The team is bigger than the player, and the game is bigger than the team." But in the U.S. the switch to "I vs We" has caused it to lose "a sense of what binds us together as a nation."

Sacks says that a soccer team, for example, can have the 11 greatest players in the world, but if each aims to show off their own talents instead of working together to score points, that team will never win.

Most traditional societies are made up of both egoism and altruism, or self-interest and collective interest. Competing for wealth or political position is all about the I, and family or community functions as the collective We.

But, **Sacks argued**, in western countries, in the last 50 years, competition in the market and political arena has remained strong while the sense of families and community has declined.

Sacks **says** that Britain and the U.S. have done the worst in dealing with the Covid pandemic because they're out of balance. "Now there's too much I and not enough We. "It is the countries that maintain that balance, like South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, New Zealand... that have coped really well."

Now, more than ever, the U.S. needs to rebalance. It's natural for people to form social identity groups for love and friendship or to achieve certain goals. But when these alliances put their own objectives before the good of the country, we have an unstable society ripe for the type of dissent and violence we've seen over the past two years.



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