



# Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change

*Harold Isaacs*

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## **Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change** Harold Isaacs

“A pacesetter, at the forefront in recognizing the persisting importance of ‘ethnicity as a force both in building nations and in tearing them apart,’ it is also a work of literary merit, crafted by a master wordsmith.” So comments Lucian Pye in reflecting on this classic work in political science and sociology about group identities bending and shaping themselves under the pressure of political change. These transformations seem to have basic similarities, whether they take place in Little Rock or Kenya, Vietnam or Pakistan, Belgium or Biafra.

Isaacs sorts out some fundamentals in forming group identity: the body, names, language, history of origins, religion, and nationality. These are dynamic elements that are melded together but have the possibility of creating new pluralisms. Diane Ravitch wrote in *Commentary*: “Isaacs's survey of global pluralism is enormously helpful in broadening our perspective, and should be required reading for anyone who cares about the shape of ethnicity in America.”

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