



ABHM Book Club Discussion Guide
September 26th, 2024 at 6 PM CT
***Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson (2020)**

How to Use this Guide:

[America's Black Holocaust Museum](#) staff created this guide to assist in reading and discussion of *Caste*. Please feel free to print a copy and keep it with your book as you lend to friends and others who are interested. Do not expect to get through all of the questions during the upcoming meeting nor in one sitting. Perhaps consider them as conversation starters or an invitation to reflect more deeply about this book.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. What is Wilkerson's central argument in *Caste*? How does re-framing over 400 years of United States history in this way help us better understand our country's problems (or does it)? Were the eight pillars useful to you in helping understand her argument? See pages 73, 93, 97, and 128-198.
2. Wilkerson uses several metaphors to explain her theory of the caste system and its impacts in the U.S. Did you find these useful? Which was the most helpful in your understanding and why? See pages 26, 35, 38, 59, 98, 243, 316, and 408.
3. How is Wilkerson's argument strengthened by comparing the U.S. caste system to the one in India? What about her comparisons to Nazism and the Holocaust in Germany? Did you find these comparisons compelling and convincing? What other comparisons could have been made across the world? See pages 40, 45, 102, 108, 113, 179, 182, 184, 317, 428, and 432.
4. How is caste different from race in Wilkerson's viewpoint? Did this argument make sense to you? After reading *Caste*, do you have a different understanding

of whiteness and racial injustice in this country? See pages 28, 40, 42, 43, 48, 53, 74, 78, 93, 97, and 213.

5. At times, Wilkerson puts herself in the narrative and describes how the U.S. caste system has impacted her personally. Did this help strengthen her argument? If so, how? Was there a story or experience that stood out to you? See pages 338, 345, 369, 401, 418, and 420.
6. One major theme in the book is about the importance of historical truth-telling as a necessary first step to solving the problems created by caste. Do you agree or disagree? How can and do museums (such as ABHM), monuments, and memorials support this effort? See pages 31, 38, 67, 246, 385, 388, 393, 396, and 434.
7. If you were able to watch *Origin*, how do you think it compared to the book? What more were you able to learn about Wilkerson's personal life? Did the storyline help you better understand the concepts presented in the book?
8. What does Wilkerson ask us to do after reading *Caste*? What can we do to address the problems she outlines as individuals? As a collective? What is the role of empathy, love, and humanity in this work? See pages 63, 217, 308, 343, and 436-438.
9. How does the framework presented in *Caste* help us better understand racial tensions within and between non-white people and communities, such as George Zimmerman murdering Trayvon Martin and African immigrants distancing themselves from Black Americans? How does it contribute to our understanding of colorism in this country and others? See pages 77, 221, 282, 283, and 351.
10. Would you recommend this book to others? Why or why not? Who would benefit most from reading it? How would you summarize this work to someone else?

Additional Sources:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/opinion/sunday/a-native-caste-society.html>

Origin by Ava DuVernay on Hulu

The History of White People by Neil Irvin Painter

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/my-trip-land-gandhi>

Annihilation of Caste by B.R. Ambedkar

Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner