

Shortlisted Book for the 2021-22 Book in Common

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Isabel Wilkerson

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents

Date: 2020

List price: \$32 hardcover

Author website: <https://valariekaur.com/see-no-stranger/>

Book website: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/653196/caste-oprahs-book-club-by-isabel-wilkerson/>

Publisher description:

In this brilliant book, Isabel Wilkerson gives us a masterful portrait of an unseen phenomenon in America as she explores, through an immersive, deeply researched narrative and stories about real people, how America today and throughout its history has been shaped by a hidden caste system, a rigid hierarchy of human rankings. Beyond race, class, or other factors, there is a powerful caste system that influences people's lives and behavior and the nation's fate. Linking the caste systems of America, India, and Nazi Germany, Wilkerson explores eight pillars that underlie caste systems across civilizations, including divine will, bloodlines, stigma, and more. Using riveting stories about people—including Martin Luther King, Jr., baseball's Satchel Paige, a single father and his toddler son, Wilkerson herself, and many others—she shows the ways that the insidious undertow of caste is experienced every day. She documents how the Nazis studied the racial systems in America to plan their out-cast of the Jews; she discusses why the cruel logic of caste requires that there be a bottom rung for those in the middle to measure themselves against; she writes about the surprising health costs of caste, in depression and life expectancy, and the effects of this hierarchy on our culture and politics. Finally, she points forward to ways America can move beyond the artificial and destructive separations of human divisions, toward hope in our common humanity. Beautifully written, original, and revealing, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* is an eye-opening story of people and history, and a reexamination of what lies under the surface of ordinary lives and of American life today.

This book is shortlisted for the 2021-22 Book in Common because

- *It is engaging to students and to a broad audience.* This well-written book combines research and real experiences to make the story come alive. The author takes a broad view of history to show the systemic/structural organization of societies around power, terror, dehumanization, cruelty, and superiority.
- *It has broad appeal across disciplines.* This book would appeal to the humanities, social sciences, communication and education, but its exploration of biological racism could open up discussions in other disciplines.
- *It is relevant and timely.* This book, written by an African-American journalist, situates a forceful critique of American misperceptions of race in a broad global and historical context of social inequality and hierarchy.
- *It relates to the university mission.* This book would deepen our conversations and understanding of the campus strategic priorities of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. Additionally, 2021-22 will be the first year of the CSU Ethnic Studies requirement, and this book would provide many opportunities to think deeply about American history.
- *It is conducive to year-long programming.* This book would allow us to further our antiracist work from 2020-21 while not replicating the conversations around *How to Be An Antiracist*.