

America's Caste System – Isabel Wilkerson

Link: <https://youtu.be/7m49DT8pPe0> [Aug 14, 2020 (7.5 mins)]

Interviewed by Trevor Noah, Pulitzer prize winning journalist and author of *The Warmth of Other Suns*, and now of *Caste*, Wilkerson describes how she came to understand that the United States has a caste system. Caste—to an overwhelming degree—determines one's standing in a society and the hierarchy into which people are placed. In the United States, race very much determines options and opportunities, and parallels from the American treatment of Black people can be made to the Indian caste system and its lowest caste, the untouchables. *Caste*, Wilkerson says is the “bones,” race is the “skin,” and “class” is the education or other aspects of changing one's image in some way that might assist in moving out of a caste rung. Understanding the American hierarchy of caste is asking us all to look beneath the surface to the infrastructure that underpins our systems. Wilkerson makes the analogy to taking possession of an older home-- with all its flaws; despite not having built this house, we inherited it and need to understand what we see and make a plan to fix it.

What the Nazis Learned from Jim Crow

Link: <https://youtu.be/o3C1HltZl8k> [Aug 12, 2020 (18 mins)]

Democracy Now interviews Isabel Wilkerson on the U.S. Racial Caste System. Wilkerson's newest book, *Caste*, looks at how caste has functioned in three countries: South Africa's Apartheid, Nazi Germany, and the United States from its history of slavery to the present. Wilkerson describes how Martin Luther King Jr. visited India in 1959 and made connections between their untouchables and the United States caste infrastructure that restricts Black persons access to education, housing, health care and moving freely in American Society. Wilkerson describes the difference between racism alone versus a caste system; the latter affects one's standing in society, the respect one is accorded, access to resources, the benefit of the doubt, assumptions of hierarchy and beauty. Wilkerson talks also about the evolution of America from a bi-polar caste system (Black-white) to a “middle caste” that included Indigenous, Brown people, and new arrivals to the country from countries—such as Ireland and Hungary—that had lower status than “whites.” There have been legal challenges mounted by newcomers to be able to “fit” into a higher/est level of the caste system, but Black people, because of their status, have never been able to change our bi-polar caste system. During research, Wilkerson found that Nazis and German eugenicists studied the Jim Crow south to learn how the US subordinated and subjugated Blacks.

Additional Resources:

The eight pillars of a caste system

- Divine will and the laws of nature.
- Heritability.
- Endogamy and control of marriage and mating.
- Purity vs. pollution.
- Occupational hierarchy.
- Dehumanization and stigma.
- Terror of enforcement, cruelty as means of control.
- Inherent superiority vs inherent inferiority.