

# CASTE: The origins of our discontent by Isabel Wilkerson

"The man in the crowd" - a photo where one man in the era of the Third Reich is refusing to salute - everyone is heeling in unison except him, arms crossed across his chest.

① He is the one man standing against the tide - the only person on the right side of history.

What would it take to be him now?

we would like to believe that we would have taken the more difficult path.

Toxins in the permafrost - summer of 2016, heat melted ice in Siberia and exposed toxins encased since 1941 - reindeer carcasses killed with anthrax.

2016 ~ 2017  
The country was losing its capacity to be shocked: the unfathomable became just another part of one's day - mass shootings / Trump's election 300 days without white house press briefing...

What had happened to America?

The earth had shifted overnight, or so it appeared.

"Silent earthquakes" - these precede the more familiar earthquakes, and are longer, slow-moving, catastrophic disruptions rumbling 20+ miles below us, too deep to be felt and too quiet to be measured. ②

← The anthrax is like the reactivation of the human pathogens of hatred and tribalism in this evolving century - it never died, it just lay in wait, sleeping, until extreme circumstances brought it to the surface + life.



Metaphor of a doctor needing us to understand our "family history" as a means to understand our OWN personal history

"It does us no good to pretend that certain ailments have not beset us, to deny the full truths of what brought us to this moment..."

★ Few problems have ever been solved by ignoring them ★

Looking beneath the history of one's own country is like learning that re: alcoholism or depression runs silent in one's family, or BRCA gene, earthquakes: **YOU EDUCATE YOURSELF**

→ Only recently have circumstances forced us, in this current era of human rupture, to search for the unseen stirrings of the human heart to discover the origins of our discontents ← ♥

America is like an old house—the work is never done and you don't expect it to be.



→ You may not want to go into the basement to see what the rains have wrought.

(4)

Choose not to look at your own peril.

Whatever you are ignoring will not go away—whatever is lurking will fester whether you choose to look or not.

Ignorance is no protection from the consequences of inaction.

Whatever you are wishing away will gnaw at you until you gather the courage to face what you would rather not see. ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on outside, but soil is unstable, cracked foundation.

HOLY SHIT MOM!

our immediate ancestors may have nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation.

We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now. — And and further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands.

You cannot fix a problem until and unless you can see it.

→ We are now called to examine a structure built long ago.

Caste = the <sup>infra</sup>structure

= the unseen skeleton

= the architecture of human hierarchy

= the subconscious code of instructions

(5)

Looking at caste is like holding the country's X-ray up to the light. ★

Caste is ...

(6)

\* the wordless usher in a darkened theatre, flashlight cast down in the aisles, guiding us to our assigned seats for a performance.

\* an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups

\* rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep the ranked groupings apart

\* reliant on the stigmatizing of those deemed inferior to justify the dehumanization necessary to keep the lowest-ranked people at the bottom & to rationalize the protocols of enforcement.

The hierarchy of a caste is not about feelings or morality.

It's about power - which groups have it and which do not.

It's about resources - which caste is seen as worthy of them and which are not who gets to acquire and control them and who does not.

It's about respect, authority, and assumptions of competence who is accorded these and who is not.

In the American caste system, the signal of rank is what we call RACE.

① It is the fixed nature of caste that distinguishes it from class. If you can ACT your way out of it, it's class, not caste.

## CASTE

Caste is fixed and rigid.  
Caste is the infrastructure of our divisions.  
It's the architecture of human hierarchy.

Caste is an artificial construction.

But caste is the underlying grammar that we encode as children.

Caste is the invisible guide to not only how we speak, but how we process information.

## RACE

A signal of rank on the basis of appearance. (8)

Race is the primary tool + the visible decor. the frontman for caste.

Race does the heavy lifting for a caste system that demands a means of human division.

← We've been trained in the language of race.

Race is the visible we to someone's caste. (the historic flash card of how they are to be treated by the public)



## CASTE

The bones  
the infrastructure

Caste is the  
powerful infrastructure that  
holds each group  
in place.

Caste is fixed +  
rigid

is not a term often  
applied to U.S.A.

"Caste makes  
distinctions where  
God has made  
none..."

Caste is the  
operating system  
for economic,  
political and  
social interactions  
in the US from the  
time of its gestation

## RACE

the skin

Race is the  
visible agent of  
the unseen force  
of caste.

Race is what we  
can see, the  
physical traits  
that have been  
given arbitrary  
meaning

Race is fluid +  
superficial, subject  
to periodic  
redefinition. (9)

Race is a human  
invention, a  
social construct,  
not a biological  
one

## CASTE IS...

the most accurate term to describe  
the workings of American society  
was not race, but caste.

When we speak of the race problem  
in America, what we really mean  
is the caste system and the  
problems which that caste system  
creates in America.

Before there was the United States  
of America, there was the caste  
system, born in colonial Virginia.  
Caste, along with its faithful servant,  
Race, is an x-factor in most any

(10) American equation, and any  
answer one might ever come  
up with to address our current  
challenges is flawed without it.

The Origins of our  
Discontents ← its in our  
permafrost  
(thawing)

# "the longest running play..."

over the run of the show, the cast has grown accustomed to who plays which part

II ↓ ↓

Stay in the roles long enough, and everyone begins to believe that the roles are preordained

↓ ↓

they become their characters

⊗ Veer from the script and you will face the consequences - you will be reminded where you went off script

the costumes are handed out at birth and can never be removed

The costumes we everyone in the cast to the roles each character will play and to each characters place on the stage.

Stick to the script and to the part you are cast to play and you will be rewarded.

When we are cast into roles, we are not ourselves. We are not supposed to be ourselves.

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

We are all players on a stage that was built long before our ancestors arrived at this land.

We are the latest cast in a long-running drama that premiered on this soil in the early seventeenth century.

"the container we have built for you..." (12)

"I find that white people are fine with me as long as I stay in my place. As long as I stay in 'the container we have built for you.' As soon as I get out of the container - it's a problem"

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

Do it often enough or at a critical moment and you may be fired, demote, cast out or killed off.



Americans are loath to talk about enslavement because it goes against our perception of our country as a just and enlightened nation, a beacon of democracy for the world.

↓ We dismiss slavery as "a sad, dark chapter" in our history ↓

(13)

This country cannot become whole until it confronts what was not a chapter in its history, but the basis of its economic and social order. For a quarter millennium, **SLAVERY WAS THE COUNTRY**.

"Americans cling to RACE ←  
as the unschooled cling ←  
to superstition" ←

- Nell Irvin Painter

"No one was white before he/she came to America"

- James Baldwin

"You know there are no black people in Africa... they don't become black until they go to America or come to the U.K. It is then that they become black"

(14)

Color is a fact.

Race is a social construct. Igbo  
Yoruba  
Ndebele  
Ewe  
Akan  
We think we "see race"  
What we actually see  
are the learned social  
meanings, the stereotypes  
that have been linked to those  
physical features by the ideology  
of race and the historical  
legacy it has left us.

Caste is not a term often applied to the United States - it's considered the language of India or feudal Europe

## The R word:

For the dominant caste, the word Racism/it is radioactive - ~~resented~~ feared, derided, lobbed back at anyone who dares to suggest it.

↓ Resistance to the word often derails any discussion of underlying behavior ~~its~~ meant to describe.

(15) What does racist mean in an era when even extremists Q won't admit to it?

The fixation in smoking rooting out individual racists or sexists can seem a losing battle in which we fool ourselves into thinking we are rooting out injustice.

\*it gives cover for those, by pointing the finger at others, to present themselves as noble and bias-free.

CASTE does not allow us to ignore structure.

- CASTE is structure
- CASTE is ranking
- CASTE is the boundaries that reinforce the fixed assignments based on what people look like
- CASTE is a living, breathing entity

(16)

To achieve a truly egalitarian world requires looking deeper than what we think we see. We cannot win against a hologram.

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑  
All of this keeps the hierarchy intact.  
CASTE predates the notion of race and has survived the era of formal, state-sponsored racism that had long been openly practiced in the mainstream.



Wow.

Like the cast on a broken arm,  
like the cast in a play, a  
caste system holds everyone  
in a fixed place.

Its invisibility is what gives it  
power and longevity.

(17)

Re: Hitler studying America as a  
model and inspiration for Third Reich:

"He praised the country's near  
genocide of Native Americans and  
the exiling to reservations of  
those who had survived."

"Hitler especially marveled at  
the American 'knack' for  
maintaining an air of robust  
innocence in the wake of mass  
death."

WTF! We don't teach  
this shit in "history"!

"the Nazis were impressed by  
the American custom of lynching  
its subordinate caste of African-  
Americans"

↳ "Mindful of appearances beyond  
their borders, the Nazis wondered  
how the United States had  
managed to turn its racial  
hierarchy into rigid law yet  
retain such a sterling reputation  
on the world stage."

(18)

They noticed that in the United  
States... "public opinion accepted  
them as natural." <sup>we were</sup> "too harsh"

↳ Mary [of the Nazis] thought  
American Law went overboard...  
they wanted to downplay the  
American prototype, arguing for  
LESS ONEROUS methods than ours.



The 8 Pillars of CASTE - the historic  
orgins that  
uphold a  
belief system

took as "the  
laws of nature" → that  
they are → took  
distortions  
of convenience - as  
long as people  
accepted they  
would justify the  
cruelties + inequalities

doesn't matter  
if the  
assumptions  
are true  
(most are not)

These are the principles upon which  
a Caste system is constructed - whether  
(19) in America, India or Nazi Germany.

### Pillar 1: Divine Will and Law of Nature

The Biblical passage (Ham's son and  
curse of Canaan) would be summoned  
to condemn + justify enslavement.  
The US + India would become the  
oldest + the largest democracies  
in human history, both build  
on caste systems undergirded by  
readings of their sacred texts.

### Pillar 2: Heritability

You were born into a certain caste

if you can act your way out of it,  
then it is Class, not caste.

### Pillar 3: Endogamy + Control of Marriage

To restrict marriage to people marrying  
within the same caste.  
Before there was USA, there was endogamy,  
said to be ordained by God.

### Pillar 4: Purity versus Pollution

Purity of dominant caste and fear of  
pollution of castes deemed beneath it.  
"the race to get under the white tent"  
all or nothing gambit for top wing.

### Pillar 5: Occupational Hierarchy

The mudsill - the first wooden beam  
of the foundation - bears the weight of the  
entire structure. Mudsill = the bottom caste  
that everything else rests on.

### Pillar 6: Dehumanization + Stigma

A war against truth - against what the eye  
can see and what the heart could feel if  
allowed to do so on its own.

### Pillar 7: Terror as Enforcement, Cruelty as a means of control

Evil asks little of the dominant caste  
other than to sit back and do nothing.  
Ordered lowest caste to do their bidding.

### Pillar 8: Inherent Superiority vs Inherent inferiority

The lowest caste was not permitted  
to bear the "symbols of success"

(20)