



# FRIENDS OF THE PALM SPRINGS LIBRARY BOOK CLUB

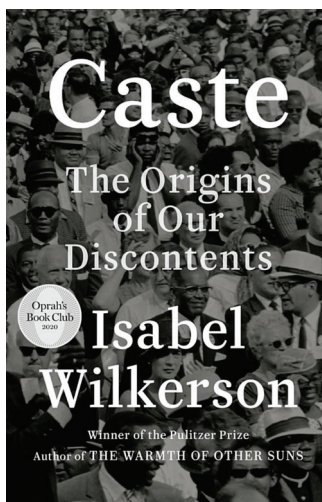
FOPSL Book Club: February 18, 2022

Book: *Caste*

Author: Isabel Wilkerson

Discussion leader: Leslie Gardiner

Discussion summary: Lisa Walters



The discussion began with Leslie giving the group information about the author and her previous book, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, and reading Wilkerson's definition of "caste."

Most group members previously associated the word with India, where a person is limited throughout his life

because of his caste; in the US, people have some chance of changing their status. We also talked about how it was difficult to separate caste from race.

We discussed the experiment that a teacher, Jane Elliott, conducted with her students in the 1960s, where students with blue eyes were considered superior to those with brown eyes for one day, and the reverse occurred the next day. Elliott had hypothesized that students would take advantage of that "superiority" and treat the other students as less valuable or less important, and this is exactly what happened.

Many group members talked about their personal experiences in teaching in newly integrated schools. Some related how badly African-American students treated African students, how some African

Americans classified others by the grade of their hair and shade of their skin, and how some complained about black students "talking white." We also discussed "code-switching" among black students and the different ways that black and white students learn.

All group members agreed that the book was well written, although at least one questioned the veracity of some of Wilkerson's assertions. One interesting thing we learned from the book was that leaders of Nazi Germany modeled their classification of Jews on US classifications of African Americans with regard to, for instance, how much "Negro blood" was necessary for a person to be considered a Negro, even at the time of World War II.

One very interesting section of *Caste* compares the attitudes of current Germans toward Nazi Germany with that of many white U.S. Southerners toward the Civil War. Germans today memorialize and honor the victims of racism, while many Southerners still memorialize and honor the perpetrators.

This book helped some readers to understand their white privilege, to see their biases, and to reflect on something they've lived with all of their lives but perhaps never considered or even recognized. Overall, the consensus was that the book helps to raise consciousness and encourages readers to try to do what they can to help ameliorate the situation.

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