



Setting Intentions Together

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February is Black History Month. Over the course of these 28/29 days, it is my annual practice to intentionally learn something new, expand my knowledge base regarding my ancestors, including, but not solely focused upon, America's darkest chapter, its original sin: chattel slavery and the [long history of racial injustice](#).

Over the weekend, my husband and I experienced filmmaker, writer, and director Ava DuVernay's importantly provocative biopic, [Origin](#). Inspired by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Isabel Wilkerson's New York Times bestselling book, [Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent](#), Ava's film invites the viewer to take a journey through Isabel's character, who eventually discovers that a [caste](#) system, not a system based on one's skin color, is what America carefully instituted and still benefits from.

In short, a caste system demands that a hierarchy of human beings exist. Some humans are categorized as superior, others inferior. All the while, propaganda messages, subtle and not subtle, espouse that "this is the natural order of things." Still today, laws are enacted and religious views espoused to support the absurd claim.

As the film's arc develops, Isabel carefully weaves together three vastly different people groups. Featured are the German Nazis' hatred of Jews, the Dalit people of India (aka the "untouchables"), and the constant and systematic terrorizing of African-descendant Americans, all of whom are psychologically harmed generationally by the caste system set up in their country. Even worse, people are murdered to maintain it.

The film highlights Ms. Wilkerson's travels and findings for research. She draws upon data outlined by Allison Davis, Burleigh, and Mary Gardner from their 1941 book,

[Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class](#),

archival research discovered in Germany connecting the Nuremberg Laws to Jim Crow in the United States, personal interviews, learnings revealed when spending time with Indian scholar, Dr. Suraj Yengde, and so much more. As Isabel tediously wades through her sources, she makes a strong case. Her book is finished.

As the film progresses, and her hypothesis substantiated, my soul breaks open. As a person of African descent and an ordained minister, I have facilitated for decades conversations regarding race for communities of faith and non-faith. Based on our current political landscape, especially with “race and racism” as a topical point, this film will not break box office records.

Origin is not a revolutionary movie, and still it (and the book which inspired it) offers a lens through which people of all ethnicities can come together and intentionally begin to deconstruct the toxic issue of “race hatred” in America. Is it possible that people who see Origin become open to the possibility that America has a caste system of its own that continues to go unexamined and unchecked? Will they join in a cause to dismantle it? Can anyone see that it hides in plain sight?

During my years of employment at the United Church of Christ’s (UCC) denominational headquarters, multiple resources have been developed to assist congregations find an entry point into often uncomfortable conversations regarding race, racism, and reconciliation from biblical, theological, anthropological, and sociological frameworks. [Join the Movement](#) toward racial justice (JTM) is a UCC campaign designed to grow our capacity as human beings for interdependence and to nurture connections that value difference and promote equity for all through a faith lens.

To conclude, I encourage you to visit the JTM homepage to learn more about this groundbreaking initiative. Furthermore, I urge you to see Origin or read the book. At a minimum, it may change your perspective. Lastly, I invite you to join me and set an annual intention to learn more Black history, no matter your ethnic heritage. [Black History is American History](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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