

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents: An Experiential Book Study Group

Here is a quote from Beverly Catlin '74 about her experience in the Book Study Group of *Caste*:

"In a safe, supportive environment Debra Abbott and Marianne Rowe facilitated book discussions around the topics presented in the book, Caste. The structure of the conversations allowed each member of the group to partake in deep conversations within safe boundaries and with mutual respect. As a result, I delved deeply into the issues presented, made connections with current events, engaged in reflective thinking, and gained new perspectives while listening to others respond."

Purpose:

This experience provides benefits to individual alumnae/i and the Hollins community in several arenas:

- Building community and connection across age and experience levels;
- Providing an ongoing education opportunity;
- Offering a forum for alumnae education, specifically about racism and caste;
- Catalyzing interest for Equity and Diversity Initiatives on campus and in the Hollins community.

Intention:

This offering is a journey of individual and collective learning, discovery, and reflection based on the group's reading of *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*, by Isabel Wilkerson.

Description:

- The group is limited to 12 alumnae and would meet every 2 weeks for 3 months-- Mondays: 9/13, 9/27, 10/11, 10/25, 11/8, 11/22 (or 11/15 instead if Thanksgiving week might be problematic); 6:30-8:00 pm Eastern, 3:30-5:00 pm Pacific.
- The small group size and format of each 90-minute gathering provides a safe container for supporting authenticity and vulnerability in the discussion.
- The facilitators assign a specific section for reading and offer questions/prompts for contemplation prior to each gathering. An example of a prompt: "On page 15, Dr. Wilkerson writes '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.' Try to remember a situation when you didn't say or do something to interrupt a racist statement or act."
- Each gathering focuses on in-depth exploration of the history of race, racism, and caste in the United States, as catalyzed by the reading.
 - There is invitation for personal sharing of history and the impact of what is learned or brought to awareness.
 - With this understanding, there is increased clarity about unresolved issues, healing, and reparation. These changes are being called-forth today personally, culturally and systemically on the Hollins campus and throughout the United States.

Format of Each Gathering:

- Opening: Brief, guided meditation practice to ground and connect

- Go-round: Personal reflection and sharing based on the reading or one of the questions or prompts provided by the facilitators.
 - If indicated, facilitators may shift this section to 2 Breakout Groups so everyone has adequate time for sharing.
- Sharing Excerpts in Large Group: 2-3 participants share an excerpt from the reading and how they felt impacted by it.
- Open Discussion in Large Group: Reflections and questions from the reading
- Closing: Summary, Next Reading, and Quote/Invitation/Dedication

Additional Notes:

This journey is geared towards a frank and honest sharing of experiences of racism. It is in service of increasing awareness, healing, and cultural/systemic transformation.

This group provides a safe container for exploring very sensitive subject matter through authenticity and vulnerability, as well as through deep sharing and deep listening. Each session provides opportunities for reflection, discussion, and exploration in service of learning, understanding, reconciliation, and compassion and radical empathy.

This experiential book study group is not for everyone.

It is for brave alumnae/i ... willing alumnae/i.

It is for alumnae/i who know that racism is detrimental to individuals and to societies *AND* who are courageous enough to explore “How am I contributing unconsciously to the perpetuation of this denigration of people and culture?”

This experiential book study group is for alumnae/i who are willing to forego the comforts of “that’s not me.”

Participants are committed to asking “what do I need to change in myself” in service of bringing our culture to a new level of relationship and a high level of being with each other that holds each and every being in reverence for their life, talents, and gifts.

This experiential book study group is for you if you are:

- Curious about the imbedded cultural messages and untold history of racism and systemic caste in the US;
- Willing to listen deeply when others are talking rather than thinking about what you're going to say;
- Comfortable enough with discomfort to explore your own implicit biases and unconscious assumptions so you can release them;
- Ready to sit in the grit of your own, your family's and your country's intentional and unintentional perpetuation of a pervasive and extensive caste system, one that representatives from Nazi Germany studied in order to implement a similar one in their country;
- Dedicated to serving the creation of a just and equitable culture enough to be uncomfortable, inconvenienced, regretful, and humbled;
- A White American and think you are free of racist or casteist assumptions;
- Inclined to move beyond being "good-hearted" into embodying conscious relationship and action ...

... All in service of cultivating a deeper understanding of what it has been like to be black in America since before the 1619 arrival of “20-and-odd” slaves in Jamestown, leading to being

inspired and dedicated to listen and support systemic change towards racial reparation and equity.