



Notes from Roanoke Change Academy's Fifth and Final *Caste* Discussion (February 8, 2021)

Participants read Part 7 of *Caste* for this week's session. We began our conversation by reviewing a passage from page 379:

"The separation of the races is not a disease of the colored people," Einstein told the graduates at commencement, "but a disease of the white people. I do not intend to be quiet about it."

After this reading, we discussed two questions as a group. Responses included:

- 1) After reading *Caste*, how has your understanding of our nation and of your place in it evolved?
 - This book was eye-opening. Participants have a deeper understanding of the U.S., particularly the South, and of how deeply embedded, systemic, and intentional our caste system is.
 - A recognition that certain dynamics are not about skin color, but about power.
 - Germany is an example and a hope for how we can acknowledge the evils we've committed in the past and what we can do about them.
 - There's significant pain in our community. Wounds, like the "urban renewal" and the removal of 1,600 bodies from where the Berglund Center and Virginia Western now are to a mass grave, take time to heal from. Could we have our own truth and reconciliation commission on a local level?
 - We have an opportunity now—let's not let it slip away.

- 2) Wilkerson has a chapter dedicated to the cost of caste. Now that you've read the whole book, what is your sense of the cost of caste?
 - Consider what we lose if we don't do anything—so much potential. It's as if we're trying to run a race with one leg. "We'll never know what we lost."
 - There are significant health risks involved with maintain our caste system. The Black community has a history of being lied to and abused, and this has created fear that could impact people's willingness to get the COVID vaccine.
 - Caste undermines everyone's economic potential and well-being.

SERV Presentation: Decca Knight, the founder of Standing for Equity in the Roanoke Valley (SERV) shared some tips on disrupting racism. Decca shared general strategies for responding to racist statements, responses for specific statements, and 5 tips for bystander intervention. In addition, she provided the following thoughts:

- In order to effectively combat racism and casteism, we have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.
- If we want to change people's minds, we need to not make them defensive.
- Hold people accountable to the person they want others to see them as.

To close out our conversation, we discussed tangible actions each of us can take to dismantle caste. Suggestions included:

- Keep reading books like *Caste!* Reading lays the foundation for us to be able to educate and reflect on ourselves.
- Consider that people want power because they're afraid. Reduce that fear with kindness and by creating compassionate relationships.
- When it's safe to do so, hold an event showing solidarity. Juneteenth 2022 was discussed as a possible date, but we also need to not infringe upon other events.
- Do what you can in your own way. Speak up when you see injustices. Donate to organizations whose work you support. Learn how to pronounce people's names. Vote and encourage others to vote.
- Think of behaviors you can do to combat "the way it's always been done."
- Place yourself under the leadership of people of color in critical areas.
- Celebrate the progress we have made and keep boldly imagining a more equitable future.

Resources from SERV:

- Bystander Interventions: https://www.ihollaback.org/bystander-resources/?fbclid=IwAR1CYCYqROpflcrv-8lNc-adySvIAsiPK00Qcay5--dl10N_LSSrDy3OX8s
- Crime statistics <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv18st.pdf>
- Harvard Implicit Bias Test: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- Memorials and statues: <https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy>
- Racism Scale: <https://racismscale.weebly.com/>
- Systemic Racism Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrHIQIO_bdQ

Recommended Reading—Suggestions by Participants:

- *Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County: A Family, A Virginia Town, a Civil Rights Battle*, by Kristen Green
- *Medical Apartheid*, by Harriet A. Washington
- *The Road to Healing: A Civil Rights Reparations Story in Prince Edward County, Virginia*, by Ken Woodley

Upcoming Events:

- 7 PM Thursday, 2/11: Cameron Patterson [talk on Barbara Johns at the Salem Museum](#) (look for the link on event day at the website): <https://sailemmuseum.org/events-activities/>

Additional Items of Interest from Group Members

- Deprogramming Extremists from the *Washington Post*: https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/02/05/desperate-families-are-seeking-groups-that-deprogram-extremists/?utm_source=pocket-newtab
- First Black person freed by Lincoln from *USA Today*: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/02/06/nance-legins-costley-of-pek-in-the-first-slave-lincoln-freed/4373306001/>
- Celebrating Black History in Virginia's Blue Ridge: https://www.visitroanokeva.com/things-to-do/history-and-heritage/black-history/?utm_term=Experience%20Black%20History%20%2526gt%3B&utm_campaign=Celebrating%20Black%20History%20Month%20in%20Virginia%5Cu2019s%20Blue%20Ridge&utm_content=email&utm_source=Act-On+Software&utm_medium=email&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software--email--Celebrating%20Black%20History%20Month%20in%20Virginia%5Cu2019s%20Blue%20Ridge--Experience%20Black%20History%20%2526gt%3B
- WE ARE ART: Roanoke Rap Cypher: <https://roanokearts.org/2021/01/29/rap-cypher/>

"I don't measure America by its achievement, but by its potential." --- Shirley Chisholm