

Origin is a 2023 American biographical drama film written and directed by Ava DuVernay. It is based on the life of Isabel Wilkerson, played by Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor, as she writes the book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. Over the course of the film, Wilkerson travels throughout Germany, India, and the United States to research the caste systems in each country's history.

Origin premiered in competition at the 80th Venice International Film Festival on September 6, 2023, and began a limited theatrical release on January 19, 2024, by Neon. The film received positive reviews from critics.

Plot

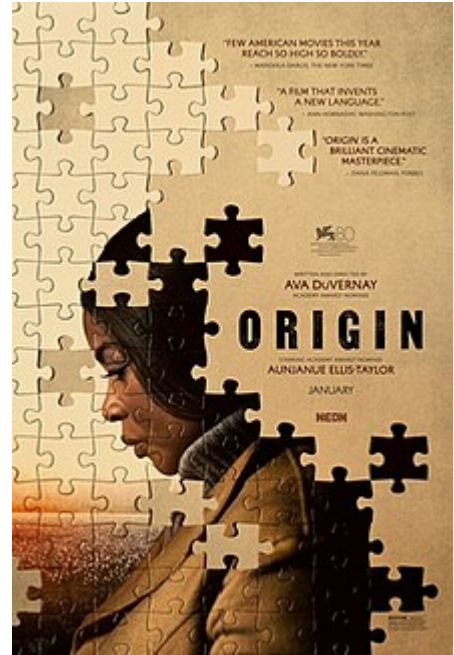
Grappling with tremendous personal tragedy, writer Isabel Wilkerson sets herself on a path of global investigation and discovery as she writes *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*.

Wilkerson is consulted for her opinion after the shooting of Trayvon Martin. She explores the idea of how race may not be the only determining factor in bigotry, since, e.g., in India, everyone may be of the same "race", but bigotry still occurs by caste. Similarly, although Jews of European descent may have been considered "White" in some parts of the world, in Nazi Germany they were defined as an inferior race to be exterminated. Wilkerson visits Germany and debates friends about how slavery compared with the Holocaust, "subjugation" versus "extermination".

Wilkerson chats at a cocktail party with two White women who are friendly, but do not fully understand her ideas and how different types of bigotry interrelate. Later, she works with one of the women on her book.

Intertwined with her ideas and discoveries, Wilkerson suffers the loss of her husband Brett, a White man; her elderly mother Ruby; and her cousin Marion. She often imagines herself speaking to those who have passed away, such as Al Bright, a Black boy who was on a winning Little League team, but when the team was invited to a swimming-pool party, he was not allowed to enter the water.

Origin



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>Ava DuVernay</u>
Written by	<u>Ava DuVernay</u>
Based on	<i><u>Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents</u></i> by <u>Isabel Wilkerson</u>
Produced by	<u>Paul Barnes</u> <u>Ava DuVernay</u>
Starring	<u>Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor</u> <u>Jon Bernthal</u> <u>Vera Farmiga</u> <u>Audra McDonald</u> <u>Niecy Nash-Betts</u> <u>Nick Offerman</u> <u>Blair Underwood</u>
Cinematography	<u>Matthew J. Lloyd</u>
Edited by	<u>Spencer Averick</u>
Music by	<u>Kris Bowers</u>

Wilkerson looks in German archives and discovers that the Nazis used some of America's racist laws to develop some of their own racist laws—Hitler said he used the Americans' extermination of Native Americans as a guide for his own extermination of Jewish people. The history of a couple in Nazi Germany is related, a male Gentile Nazi-party member who has a romance with a Jewish woman. They try to escape Germany, but she is caught and sent to a camp.

Also told is the story of married Black researchers Allison and Elizabeth Davis, who work with a White couple, Burleigh and Mary Gardner, in an undercover project to find out about segregation in America, resulting in the 1941 book *Deep South*. A lynching of a Black man is shown, with a White audience watching, some of them treating it as a show.

Production company	<u>ARRAY Filmworks</u>
Distributed by	<u>Neon</u>
Release dates	September 6, 2023 (<u>Venice</u>) January 19, 2024 (United States)
Running time	141 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$38 million ^[2]
Box office	\$4.9 million ^{[3][4]}

Wilkerson eventually decides to write a book about caste, a concept which solves some of the intellectual problems which mere consideration of race does not. She visits India and the home, now a historical site, of Dr. Ambedkar, who championed Dalit ("untouchable") rights. Eventually she speaks about her new book *Caste* on stage, and how it makes it easier to understand and fight bigotry.

Finally, an onscreen monologue details that *Caste* became a number one *New York Times* nonfiction best-seller around the time of the November 2020 U.S. presidential election, and spent ample time on the best-sellers list.

Cast

- Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor as Isabel Wilkerson^[5]
- Jon Bernthal as Brett Hamilton, Isabel's husband^[5]
- Niecy Nash as Marion Wilkerson, Isabel's cousin^[6]
- Emily Yancy as Ruby Wilkerson, Isabel's mother^[5]
- Finn Wittrock as August Landmesser^[6]
- Victoria Pedretti as Irma Eckler^[6]
- Jasmine Cephas Jones as Elizabeth Davis^[6]
- Isha Blaaker as Allison Davis^[6]
- Vera Farmiga as Kate
- Audra McDonald as Miss Hale
- Connie Nielsen as Sabine^[5]
- Blair Underwood as Amari Selvan, Isabel's editor^[5]
- Nick Offerman as Dave the Plumber^[5]
- Stephanie March as Binky
- Myles Frost as Trayvon Martin^[6]
- Suraj Yengde, Ph.D. as himself^[5]
- Donna Mills as Mrs. Copeland
- Jordan Lloyd as a friend

- [Franz Hartwig](#) as [Erich Kastner](#)
- [Daniel Lommatzsch](#) as [Joseph Goebbels](#)
- [Gaurav J. Pathania](#) as [B. R. Ambedkar](#)^[5]

Production

In October 2020, it was announced that [Ava DuVernay](#) would direct, write, and produce a film adaption of *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* for [Netflix](#).^[7] After Netflix was no longer attached and other studios passed, DuVernay turned to financing from [Ford Foundation](#), [Emerson Collective](#) and Pivotal Ventures, among others.^[8] In January 2023, [Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor](#), [Niecy Nash-Betts](#), [Jon Bernthal](#), [Vera Farmiga](#), [Jasmine Cephas Jones](#), [Nick Offerman](#) and [Connie Nielsen](#) joined the cast of the film.^{[9][10]} In February 2023, [Audra McDonald](#), [Myles Frost](#), [Blair Underwood](#), [Victoria Pedretti](#), [Isha Blaaker](#), [Finn Wittrock](#), [Leonardo Nam](#) and [Donna Mills](#) joined the cast of the film.^{[11][12]}

Principal photography began in December 2022.^[13] The film ends with New Zealand musician [Stan Walker](#)'s song "I Am", which is sung bilingually in English and [Māori](#).^[14]

Release

Origin had its world premiere at the [80th Venice International Film Festival](#) on September 6, 2023, where it was in competition for the [Golden Lion](#) award, and received a standing ovation for more than eight minutes.^{[15][16]} Prior to this, [Neon](#) acquired distribution rights to the film.^[17] It also screened at the [2023 Toronto International Film Festival](#) on September 11, 2023.^[18] It had a one-week qualifying run in New York and Los Angeles on December 8, 2023, officially opened in limited theatrical release on January 19, 2024, expanded to a wider release on January 26, 2024.^{[19][20]} The film was released in the UK by [Black Bear Pictures](#) on March 8, 2024.^[21]

Origin was released on digital platforms on March 12, 2024.^[22]

Reception

Box office

Origin had a qualifying run December 8–10, 2023, grossing \$117,063 from two theaters; the \$58,531 per-venue average was the 4th-best of the year.^[23] In its official opening weekend January 19–21, 2024, the film made \$826,235 from 125 theaters.^[24] It expanded to 664 theaters the following weekend, making \$1.3 million.^[25]

Critical response

On the review aggregator website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), 81% of 172 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.5/10. The website's consensus reads: "A moving drama that's unafraid to ask big questions, *Origin* honors its source material with powerful performances in service of a deeply emotional story."^[26] [Metacritic](#), which uses a [weighted average](#), assigned the film a score of 75 out of 100, based on 45 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.^[27] Test audiences gave the film a 91% overall positive score, with 81% saying they would definitely recommend the film.^[28]

Critics widely regarded *Origin* as "ambitious".^{[29][30][31][32][33][34][35]} *Variety* described the film as "a swirling tornado of ideas"^[31] and "a masterpiece",^[36] while *RogerEbert.com* considered the film to be "a dense, forceful masterwork."^[30] Reviews for Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor's performance were very positive, described as "virtuoso",^[34] "moving",^[33] and "stunning".^[29] Several critics directed particular praise to the scene where Isabel meets Miss Hale (played by Audra McDonald), which Richard Brody of *The New Yorker* described as "powerful"^[37] and Ann Hornaday of *The Washington Post* as the film's "most heartbreaking passage".^[29]

DuVernay's choice to film *Origin* with 16mm film was praised by *RogerEbert.com*, noting that the corresponding consistent visual look of the film emphasized the connectedness of Wilkerson's ideas.^[30] Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* found the 911 calls by George Zimmerman (who shot and killed Trayvon Martin) in the film "excruciating", but noted that they intensify an urgency in the film "that feels very much like the sounding of an alarm."^[33] *Variety* praised the choice for the narrative to include moments where Isabel deals with personal adversity, noting that these details make Isabel's character "richer and more relatable" and share similarities with films by Agnès Varda.^[31]

The film's use of different styles divided critics. Brody considered the films "fusion of history and subjectivity" to be an achievement,^[37] and thought the film's creative freedom was reminiscent to the modernist films of Ingmar Bergman and Alain Resnais.^[37] Hornaday thought that the film "seems to create a new cinematic language",^[29] and *The A.V. Club* thought that the film's experimentation with styles was admirable and demonstrated DuVernay's "visual dexterity".^[34] Writers at *The Guardian* and *Polygon*, however, thought the film would have been more effective as a documentary.^{[21][35]} The scene with the plumber wearing the MAGA hat also led to a difference in critical opinions;^{[21][34]} Hornaday for example thought the scene was "a master class in unspoken expression"^[29] while *RogerEbert.com* considered it "too on the nose".^[30]

African-American film critic Candice Frederick of *The Huffington Post* wrote a less than enthusiastic review as she criticized the film for having no actual story, lack of subtlety in its message and, just like criticism of the book, pointed out already-understood issues without moving the conversation forward.^[38]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>AARP Movies for Grownups Awards</u>	<u>January 17, 2024</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>	Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor	Nominated	[39]
<u>African-American Film Critics Association</u>	2024	Top 10 Films	<i>Origin</i>	Runner-up	[40]
		Best Drama	<i>Origin</i>	Won	
		Best Director	Ava DuVernay	Won	
		Best Actress	Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor	Won	
<u>Black Reel Awards</u>	<u>January 16, 2024</u>	<u>Outstanding Film</u>	Ava DuVernay and Paul Barnes	Nominated	[41]
		<u>Outstanding Director</u>	Ava DuVernay	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Screenplay</u>		Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Lead Performance</u>	Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Editing</u>	Spencer Averick	Nominated	
<u>Gotham Awards</u>	<u>27 November 2023</u>	<u>Outstanding Lead Performance</u>	<u>Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor</u>	Nominated	[42][43]
<u>Hollywood Music in Media Awards</u>	<u>15 November 2023</u>	<u>Best Original Song – Feature Film</u>	"I Am" – Stan Walker, Michael Fatkin, Vince Harder, Te Kanapu Anasta	Nominated	[44]
<u>NAACP Image Awards</u>	<u>March 16, 2024</u>	<u>Outstanding Motion Picture</u>	<i>Origin</i>	Nominated	[45]
		<u>Outstanding Directing in a Motion Picture</u>	Ava DuVernay	Won	
		<u>Outstanding Actress in a Motion Picture</u>	Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Youth Performance in a Motion Picture</u>	Lennox Simm	Nominated	
<u>Venice International Film Festival</u>	<u>9 September 2023</u>	<u>Golden Lion</u>	<u>Ava DuVernay</u>	Nominated	[46]
<u>Virginia Film Festival</u>	29 October 2023	Audience Award – Narrative Feature	<i>Origin</i>	Won	[47]
		Visionary Award	Ava DuVernay	Won	[47]

Washington D.C. Area Film Critics Association Awards	10 December 2023	Best Adapted Screenplay	Ava DuVernay	Nominated	[48]
Women Film Critics Circle	2023	Best Movie About Women	Origin	Nominated	[49]
		Best Movie About a Woman		Nominated	
		Josephin Baker Award		Nominated	
		Best Woman Storyteller	Ava DuVernay	Nominated	
		Best Actress	Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor	Nominated	

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External links

- [Official website \(https://www.originfilm.com\)](https://www.originfilm.com) 
 - *Origin* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13321244/>) at [IMDb](#)
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