



AFRICAN ODYSSEYS PREVIEW

Origin

Origin

Director: Ava DuVernay
Production Companies: Array Filmworks, J4A
Producers: Ava DuVernay, Paul Ganes
Unit Production Manager: Thane Watkins
Production Supervisor: Tom Carson
Script Supervisor: Alicia Accardo
Casting Director: Aisha Coley
Location Manager: Kellie Morrison
Written by: Ava DuVernay
Inspired by Caste: The Origin of Our Discontent by: Isabel Wilkerson
Cinematographer: Matthew J. Lloyd
Camera Operator: Christine Ng
Editor: Spencer Averick
Additional Editor: Alan Baumgarten
Production Designer: Ina Mayhew
Costume Designer: Dominique Dawson
Composer: Kris Bowers
Sound Designer: Al Nelson
Supervising Sound Editors: Brian Chumney, Steve Slanec
Sound Mixer: Willie D. Burton
Cast:
Aunjanue Ellis Taylor (*Isabel Wilkerson*)
Jon Bernthal (*Brett Hamilton*)
Emily Yancy (*Ruby Wilkerson*)
Vera Farmiga (*Kate*)
Blair Underwood (*Amari Selvan*)
Audra McDonald (*Miss Hale*)
Nick Offerman (*Dave the plumber*)
Connie Nielsen (*Sabine*)
Finn Wittrock (*August Landmesser*)
Niecy Nash-Betts (*Marion Wilkerson*)
Jasmine Cephas Jones (*Elizabeth Davis*)
Victoria Pedretti (*Irma Eckler*)
Isha Blaaker (*Allison Davis*)
Myles Frost (*Trayvon Martin*)
USA 2023
141 mins
Digital

A Black Bear Pictures release

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SIGHT AND SOUND

Following the screening, there will be a discussion in the Blue Room hosted by actor, director, presenter, Burt Caesar, who will be joined by author and publisher Michelle Asantewa, and Nicole-Rachelle Moore, Curator Caribbean Collections, British Library. Free to ticket-holders of the screening of *Origin*, subject to capacity.

Written and directed by Academy Award nominee Ava DuVernay, *Origin* chronicles the tragedy and triumph of Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Isabel Wilkerson as she investigates a global phenomenon of epic proportions. Portrayed by Academy Award nominee Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor (*King Richard*), Isabel experiences unfathomable personal loss and love as she crosses continents and cultures to craft one of the defining American books of our time. Inspired by the *New York Times* best-seller *Caste*, *Origin* explores the mystery of history, the wonders of romance and a fight for the future of us all.

The Origin of 'Origin'

By the time Ava DuVernay finally sat down to read Isabel Wilkerson's groundbreaking book, *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents*, several friends had implored her to do so. Hailed as an eye-opening, globe-spanning deconstruction of social hierarchies and the destruction they cause, Wilkerson's book sent DuVernay in a million directions. 'There are so many ideas in the book that took me down beautiful paths. I would read something, be fascinated by it and go off and research that. And then another thing would pop up a few pages later,' she says. 'It took me a couple of weeks to finish it. And then I read it again and again. I had a sense of wanting to be "town crier." I wanted to make sure other people knew about what Isabel had shared.'

For DuVernay, inviting people into the world of Wilkerson's making meant seeing the sprawling book's latent potential as a film. It wouldn't be easy adapting a book that connects centuries of injustices – from American slavery and Jim Crow to the Holocaust and the Indian caste system. 'The book is an intimidating size. It's weighty subject matter,' she says. 'But within the pages that explore sociology, philosophy and history, I saw Isabel. Her story. Her voice. I knew that the way to share the concepts and information in the book was to enter her world, her motivations, her losses, her triumphs, her drive.'

DuVernay had heard about Wilkerson's personal tragedies during the writing of *Caste*. 'She was grieving at the time,' DuVernay says. 'To consider that someone could be grieving, but so highly functioning, so exploratory, so intellectually adventurous to embark on this investigation that took her around the world... that is really what made me think this should be a film. This movie isn't called *Caste*. It's *Origin*. My script is inspired by the book as well as the additional element of the author's journey while writing it.'

In essence, *Origin* is a film about creative and intellectual passions pursued through grief and rejection. 'The film delves into the interiority of a scholar seeking to explain the root of our divisions. That scholar happens to be a woman. She also happens to be a Black woman. The centring of such a character in film isn't the norm. And it was an absolute thrill to bring to life.'

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Preview: High & Low – John Galiano

Mon 4 Mar 20:40

Kinoteka Polish Film Festival Opening Night

London Premiere: Green Border Zielona granica +

Q&A with director Agnieszka Holland

Wed 6 Mar 19:00

Woman with a Movie Camera International

Women's Day Preview: Banel & Adama + Q&A

with director Ramata-Toulaye Sy

Fri 8 Mar 18:10

Woman with a Movie Camera International

Women's Day Preview: Elaha

Fri 8 Mar 20:45

TV Preview: Inside No. 9: The Final Series + Q&A

with Reece Shearsmith, Steve Pemberton and

executive producer Adam Tandy

Mon 11 Mar 18:15

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI IMAX

Mon 11 Mar 18:15

TV Preview: Mandy + Q&A with Diane Morgan

Tue 12 Mar 18:10

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Projecting the Archive: Dance Pretty Lady + intro

by Marc David Jacobs, writer and film nerd

Tue 5 Mar 18:30

Restored: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Tue 5 Mar 20:45

Experimenta: The Blue Description Project: Blue

+ discussion

Fri 8 Mar 18:15

Filmmaking for Artists: Beginners Filmmaking

Workshop

Sun 10 Mar 10:30–16:30 (one session)

Filmmaking for Artists: Intermediate Filmmaking

Workshop

Sun 31 Mar 10:30–16:30 (one session)

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Over the course of fifteen months, DuVernay interviewed Wilkerson more than a dozen times. Though Wilkerson is a private person, she graciously opened up to DuVernay about her life, their talks magnified by the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The timing served as a stark backdrop for the principles that Wilkerson lays out in the book, as essential workers risked their lives daily for others' comfort. 'That added to the intensity of what I was feeling and thinking and learning from Isabel at the time,' DuVernay says.

DuVernay had adapted source material before, but every adaptation is its own puzzle box, and Wilkerson granted DuVernay the ability to go outside of the book to piece together her story. 'She allowed me to use the book as a foundation for my own exploration. She answered all of my questions for over a year. She leaned into my process and encouraged me to find my own way,' DuVernay says, and that permission opened up several avenues for interpretation that imbued the script with human faces and dramatic stories, including those of Wilkerson herself as well as historical figures.

For instance, the characters of August and Irma, a Nazi man and a Jewish woman hopelessly in love against all odds, were mentioned briefly in the book. 'The scene discussed in the book is August not saluting at a Nazi rally because he loved a Jewish woman,' DuVernay says. 'Through research, I pieced together the rest of their story to share what happened to them. The book wonderfully explains sociological concepts and philosophical theory. I was interested in how to extend Isabel's explanations through development of the human stories that she introduces.' The result of this additional research are riveting journeys into history that accompany Wilkerson's own story of discovery, love, and loss, creating parallel narratives between the present and the past to illustrate the interconnectedness of people in all times and all places.

Though one might believe such heavy material in a film would exclude lighter, more joyful moments, there's an intense focus on what connects us more than what divides us. DuVernay notes that many of the sweeping, romantic aspects of the film are inspired directly by her discussions with Wilkerson about her husband. 'Her memories of him are so vivid and so filled with joy,' she says. 'I included these wisps of memory to try to evoke what they shared, which is this extraordinary love that continues, even though he's no longer physically present.' The film exemplifies that nothing truly ends and that everything matters; the endless memory of trauma or love, both equally as strong, vying for their time in the sun.

Folded into the moving stories of real people affected by the long gaze of injustice is a sly cautionary tale, asking audiences to engage in some soul searching. 'I'm not seeking agreement with Isabel's book,' DuVernay says. 'I'm seeking engagement. I hope it instigates conversation. Do we see that in the state of Florida they are taking books off shelves and criminalising teaching history? Do we all see this happening? Let us be informed and think twice about where it leads. That is one of the goals of the film.'

Production notes