

I have another name^u



By: Sarah Asch

The

Handmaid's

Tale

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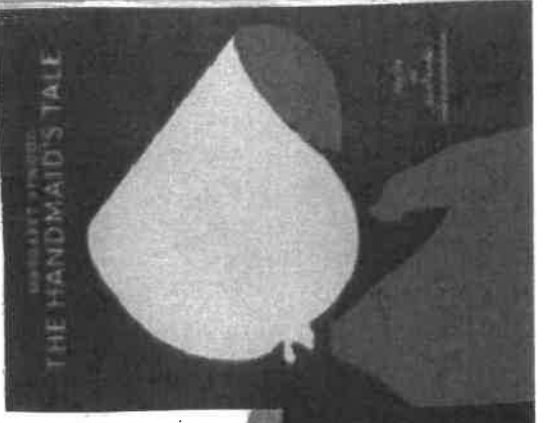
the historical treatment of women

If you haven't seen the Show, a quick recap: The Handmaid's Tale came out in 2017 and it's based on a book by Margaret Atwood.

It centers on a dystopian future in which fertile women are kept as breeding slaves to produce babies for the powerful commanders. The main character, June, was separated from her daughter + husband and no longer gets to use her name.

Margaret Atwood

Original name: June



Much of the torture/dystopian systems in the show are drawn from historical realities that real women faced. In fact, a critique of the plot is that it takes facts from the lives of enslaved black women (rape, being used like breeders, separation from children) and recasts them with a (culturally more sympathetic) white woman in the center of the story.

"Better never means better for everyone... It always means worse, for some."

June is separated from her daughter Hannah



Sterile. That's a forbidden word. There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore. There's only women who are fruitful and women who are barren.

Like women throughout history have had little autonomy over their own bodies. The handmaids are raped monthly at the "Ceremony" in the hopes of impregnating them. This ritualized violence has echoes of America's racial history - where black women were often subjected to the sexual "needs" of white men.

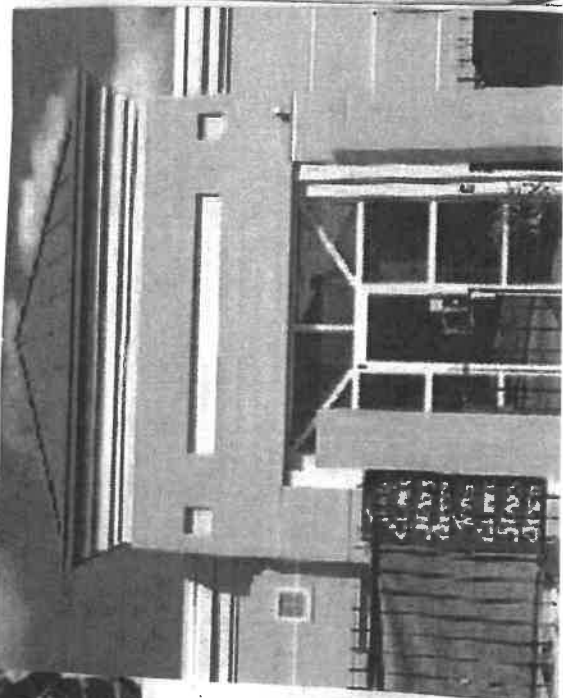
However, the show claims to be post-racial and does not address any racial dynamics or our country's racial history

pregnant handmaid

The most obvious parallel between the show and the modern struggle for women's rights is the issue of abortion. In a world with breeding slaves, abortion is obviously illegal as is birth control. The world has been taken over by Christian fundamentalists. This mirrors the current effort by right-wing conservatives to repeal Roe v Wade + limit access to contraceptives

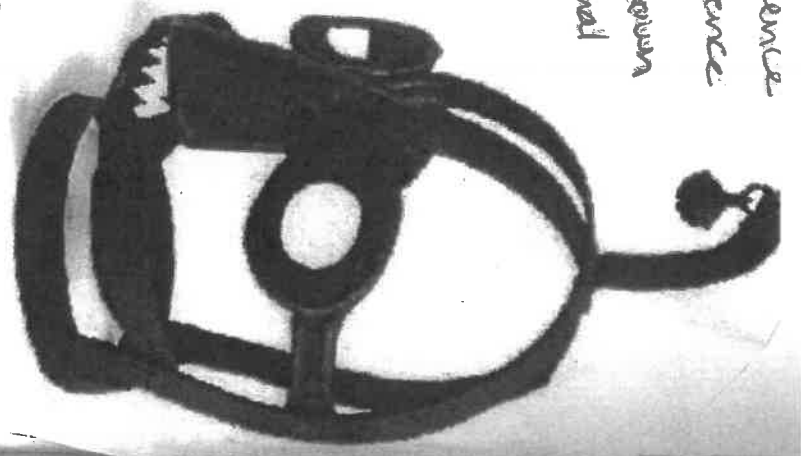


the pink house
(only remaining abortion clinic)
in Mississippi



Other kinds of violence in the show reference older, less well-known practices that patriarchal societies used to control women - both their sexuality and their speech (which were long considered to be connected).

In the 18th century or immodest talkative



Women

women were fitted with scold bridles - painful and humiliating devices that limited speech and supposedly protected male dominance.



"All you have to do, I tell myself, is keep your mouth shut and look stupid. It shouldn't be that hard."

Women have their mouths covered at various parts of the show.

The most direct comparison is the mouth staples used in the 3rd season to ensure that

certain hand models are docile and obedient. As the practice

spreads in Cilead, it's viewed as a threat for those who can

still open their mouths - a warning

The staples come with an elaborate face

covering as well, further obscuring

the woman's

mouths + restricting

movement



Interestingly, while the show does not address race, it looks closely at homosexuality. Being queer is a grave sin in this religious world and women found to be "gender traitors" face strict punishments that we have seen occur throughout history and into the present day — including death, clitoral castration, imprisonment, hard labor, etc

"Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.
Don't let the bastards grind you down."

At the heart of the matter,
the Handmaid's Tale reproduces
a world that sanctions systems
and interpersonal violence against
women at the hands of men,
which should feel all too

familiar to viewers who are
paying attention.

Even privileged women in the
show face horrific violence for
stepping out of line.



There is more than one kind of
freedom," said Aunt Lydia. "Freedom to
be free from. In the days of
theocracy, it was freedom to. Now you are
being given freedom from. Don't
degrade it."

However, one last thing
is worth noting is that

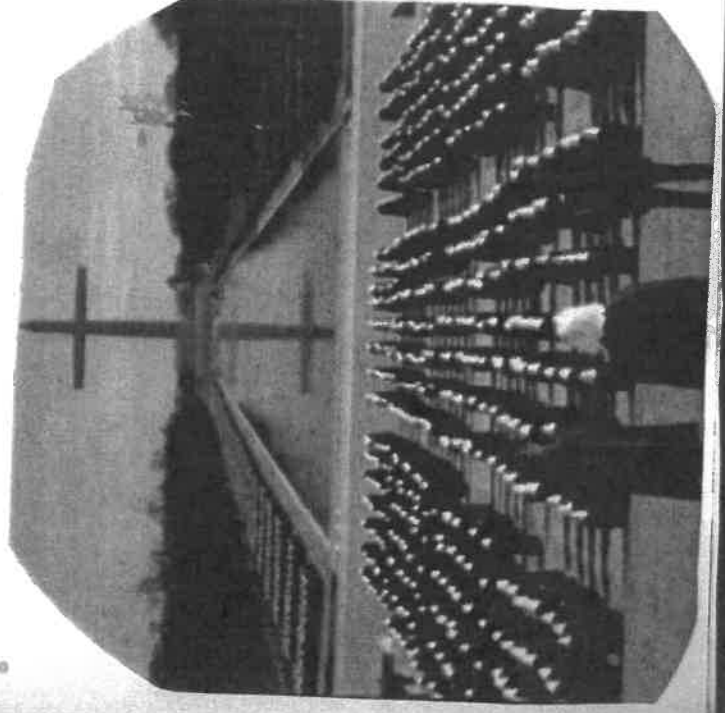
I think is worth noting is that
this fictionalized world would
not be possible without women
(the wives + aunts) who are
willing to do violence against
other women in
order to maintain
their own marginal
power.

This of course
has its roots
in history just
like everything
else



only religiosity apparent but
also disruptive to the natural
reproductive order.

This invokes old tropes about gay
people not reproducing when
in fact Emily + her wife
have a son before the new gov.
takes over — in this way the
show critiques outdated arguments
against queerness + gay marriage



Now, I'm awake...

