



The Intersection of Race and Gender in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Dr. Sanjay Kumar,

Assistant Professor, PG Dept of English,

Magadh University, Bodh Gaya

skpmubg@gmail.com , Contact-7888515947

ABSTRACT

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is a landmark dystopian novel that critiques patriarchal oppression through the lens of gender subjugation in the theocratic Republic of Gilead, where women are stripped of autonomy and reduced to reproductive roles. However, its treatment of race has sparked significant scholarly debate, with critics arguing that the novel marginalizes or erases racial dynamics, prioritizing a white feminist narrative. This research paper delves into the intersection of race and gender, analyzing how racial oppression intertwines with gendered control, the consequences of racial erasure, and critiques from intersectional feminist perspectives, drawing on textual evidence, scholarly analyses, and historical contexts.

Atwood foregrounds gender as the primary axis of oppression, vividly depicting Gilead's patriarchal mechanisms—such as the Ceremony, where Handmaids like Offred are forced into sexual servitude (p. 94). Yet, race is addressed sparingly, often through oblique references like the “resettlement of the Children of Ham” (p. 83), a euphemism for the exile or genocide of Black individuals, evoking historical racial purges. This suggests Gilead's patriarchy is underpinned by white supremacy, as only white women's fertility is valued, while people of color are erased from the narrative. The absence of non-white voices—Offred's perspective is implicitly white—reinforces this erasure, reflecting white feminism's tendency to universalize gendered oppression while ignoring racial complexities.

Intersectional feminist scholars, like Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlight how race and gender compound oppression, a dynamic that Atwood gestures toward but underexplores. For instance, the novel's anti-literacy laws for Handmaids (p. 174) parallel historical restrictions on enslaved Black women, yet these parallels are not centered. Critics argue this appropriation of racial trauma for white narratives undermines the novel's feminist critique, mirroring real-world



exclusions in white feminism. By examining the “resettlement” of minorities, the lack of diverse perspectives, and parallels to racial injustices like apartheid, this paper argues that Gilead’s regime intertwines white supremacy with patriarchy, yet Atwood’s limited racial focus weakens her critique.

Keywords- Handmaid Tale, Genocide, Black Women, Feminism, Apartheid, Minorities

1. INTRODUCTION

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood constructs a harrowing vision of a future United States transformed into the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian theocracy where environmental catastrophe, declining birth rates, and religious fundamentalism justify the systematic enslavement of women for reproductive purposes. The protagonist, Offred, a Handmaid forced into sexual servitude, narrates her experiences in a society that strips women of autonomy, reducing them to their biological functions. The novel's exploration of gender oppression—through mechanisms like the Ceremony, surveillance, and linguistic control—has cemented its status as a feminist classic, inspiring adaptations and cultural references amid contemporary debates on reproductive rights.

Yet, beneath this gendered dystopia lies a troubling undercurrent of racial dynamics that Atwood addresses sparingly, often through oblique references rather than direct engagement. Race intersects with gender in Gilead's hierarchical structure, where white women's bodies are commodified for reproduction while people of color are exiled or eliminated, implying a racial purity underpinning the regime's patriarchal control. This intersection, or lack thereof, invites scrutiny: How does the novel's portrayal of race enhance or diminish its critique of gender oppression? Scholars argue that Atwood's focus on a universal “woman's experience” inadvertently perpetuates white feminist narratives, erasing the compounded oppressions faced by women of color.

This paper examines the intersection of race and gender in *The Handmaid's Tale* by analyzing key textual elements, such as the “resettlement” of the “Children of Ham,” the treatment of Jewish characters, and the regime's racist foundations. It incorporates intersectional feminist theory, drawing from scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined “intersectionality” to describe how overlapping identities amplify discrimination. The analysis is structured as



follows: a literature review of existing critiques, an examination of racial representations in the novel, an exploration of how race intersects with gender oppression, and a discussion of the novel's cultural impact and limitations. Quotations from the text are cited with page numbers from the 1986 Houghton Mifflin edition for consistency. Ultimately, this paper posits that Atwood's novel, while powerful in its gender critique, reveals the pitfalls of non-intersectional feminism, urging readers to consider race as an inseparable facet of oppression.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discourse on *The Handmaid's Tale* has evolved from initial praise for its feminist dystopia to more nuanced critiques incorporating intersectionality. Early analyses, such as those in the 1980s, focused on gender and totalitarianism, viewing Gilead as a metaphor for patriarchal backlash against second-wave feminism. For instance, critics highlighted how the novel draws from historical events like the Salem witch trials and Iran's Islamic Revolution to warn against religious extremism.

However, by the 1990s and 2000s, feminist scholars of color began interrogating the novel's racial blind spots. Ana Cottle, in her characterization of the book as "white feminism," argues that Atwood appropriates the historical traumas of enslaved Black women—such as forced reproduction and family separation—while relocating African Americans out of Gilead, thus centering white women's suffering. This critique echoes bell hooks' broader indictment of white feminism for ignoring racial hierarchies.

Recent studies apply intersectional frameworks more explicitly. In "The Handmaid's Tale through the Lens of Intersectionality," the authors examine how power, class, gender, and religion intersect to oppress women, noting that race is an underexplored factor in Gilead's stratification. Similarly, a 2024 study on intersectional feminism in the novel explores body politics and societal frameworks, highlighting how racial erasure reinforces gendered control. Environmental critiques, such as those linking Gilead's rise to ecological collapse and racial politics, argue that the regime's "politics of abortion" is tied to white supremacist fears of demographic shifts.

Adaptations, particularly Hulu's TV series (2017-present), have amplified these discussions. Critics like those in *The Verge* note that both the novel and series engage in racial erasure by



borrowing from Black history to evoke empathy for white characters. Articles in *The Guardian* and *NYLON* criticize the show's colour-blind casting as performative, failing to address Gilead's inherent racism. These works underscore the novel's relevance to contemporary issues like reproductive justice and authoritarianism, but call for more inclusive interpretations.

This review reveals a consensus that Atwood's text, while groundbreaking, requires intersectional re-evaluation to fully grasp its implications on race and gender.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. Racial Representations in *The Handmaid's Tale*

In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), race is not a central theme but emerges through subtle, chilling references that underscore the white supremacist foundations of the theocratic Republic of Gilead. While the novel's primary focus is patriarchal oppression, its sparse yet deliberate mentions of race reveal a dystopian society built on intertwined systems of racial and gendered control. This analysis explores how Atwood portrays race through textual references, the implications of these portrayals, and the scholarly critiques that highlight the novel's racial blind spots. By examining key passages, such as the "resettlement of the Children of Ham" (83), the treatment of Jewish characters, and the implied erasure of Native Americans, this paper argues that Gilead's racial policies—though underdeveloped—reflect a deliberate ethnic cleansing that parallels historical injustices. The scarcity of racial references, coupled with Offred's white perspective, normalizes racial homogeneity, limiting the novel's depth and mirroring white feminist tendencies to marginalize racial narratives.

3.1.1. The "Children of Ham" and Ethnic Cleansing

The most explicit reference to race in *The Handmaid's Tale* occurs in Chapter 14, during a television broadcast viewed by Offred, "Resettlement of the Children of Ham is continuing on schedule," says the reassuring pink face, back on the screen. "Three thousand have arrived this week in National Homeland One, with another two thousand in transit" (83). The phrase "Children of Ham" alludes to the biblical curse of Ham, a narrative historically misused to justify slavery and segregation of Black people in Western societies. In Gilead, this "resettlement" is a euphemism for



forced relocation or genocide, evoking real-world atrocities like apartheid-era Bantustans in South Africa or Nazi deportations to concentration camps. The broadcaster's "reassuring pink face" underscores the racialized nature of the regime's propaganda, implying a white authority orchestrating the removal of Black individuals to preserve a racially homogenous order.

Scholars interpret this passage as evidence of Gilead's ethnic cleansing. The term "National Homeland One" suggests segregated territories akin to colonial or apartheid systems, where non-white populations are confined or eliminated to maintain white dominance. The scale—"three thousand" this week alone—indicates a systematic, state-sanctioned operation, chillingly normalized within Gilead's media. This reference, though brief, situates race as a tool for consolidating power, aligning with historical practices of racial exclusion to bolster authoritarian regimes. Yet, its brevity underscores Atwood's choice to prioritize gender, leaving racial dynamics as a haunting subtext rather than a developed theme.

3.1.2. Treatment of Jewish Characters

Gilead's racial policies extend to Jewish characters, who face similar erasure under the guise of choice. In the Historical Notes, Professor Pieixoto outlines Gilead's approach: "As for the Jews, those who converted were allowed to stay. Those who did not were given the choice between converting and emigration to Israel. Many chose the latter, some, it was said, out of idealism, others out of prudence" (p. 302). This sanitized account, delivered in an academic tone, contrasts with Offred's earlier hint at darker realities: "They said some Jews were drowned in the sea, during the repatriation" (p. 200). The discrepancy reveals Gilead's hypocrisy, masking violence as voluntary emigration, much like historical antisemitic purges framed as "relocation."

A subtler reference in Chapter 12 further illuminates pre-Gilead racial attitudes: Offred recalls her mother's "Jewish maid," noting, "She believed in decency, she was nice to the Jewish maid, or nice enough, nicer than she needed to be" (p. 56). This passing mention highlights casual racism in the pre-Gilead world, where



“decency” toward Jewish individuals is framed as optional benevolence rather than a baseline expectation. In Gilead, this evolves into systemic extermination, as non-converted Jews are either killed or deported. These references collectively portray Jewish characters as targets of religious and racial persecution, reinforcing Gilead’s white Christian ethnostate.

3.1.3. Erasure of Native Americans

The novel’s silence on Native Americans is equally telling. Gilead’s territorial control spans the former United States, yet no Indigenous presence is mentioned, implying their complete erasure through genocide or displacement. This absence aligns with historical patterns of settler colonialism, where Indigenous populations were systematically removed to establish white dominance. Atwood’s failure to address this explicitly mirrors the novel’s broader tendency to marginalize non-white narratives, rendering Native Americans invisible in Gilead’s racial hierarchy. This omission is particularly stark given the novel’s setting in a reimagined North America, where Indigenous histories of dispossession could have paralleled the Handmaids’ loss of agency.

3.1.4. Offred’s White Perspective and Racial Homogeneity

The scarcity of racial references—fewer than a dozen across the novel—reflects Atwood’s intentional focus on gender over race. Offred’s narrative perspective, implicitly white, normalizes racial homogeneity, as her world lacks non-white characters in significant roles. This mirrors how white narratives often overlook racial injustice, presenting a universalized experience that erases diverse voices. For instance, the anti-literacy laws imposed on Handmaids—“We were not allowed to read” (p. 174)—echo historical prohibitions against enslaved Africans, yet Atwood does not connect these dots explicitly. Similarly, the removal of Handmaids’ surnames, reducing them to “Of” their Commanders (e.g., “Offred”), parallels slave naming practices, where individuals were stripped of familial identities. These parallels suggest Atwood borrows from Black and Indigenous histories to heighten



the horror of gender oppression, but without centering the racial groups whose traumas inspire these elements.

This approach limits the novel's depth, as race becomes a backdrop to amplify gender horror rather than a co-equal axis of oppression. Offred's lack of reflection on racial dynamics—unlike her detailed critiques of gender—reinforces this marginalization. Her silence on the “Children of Ham” or Jewish deportations suggests either ignorance or acceptance of Gilead's racial order, implicating her narrative in the regime's white supremacy. This narrative choice aligns with critiques of white feminism, which often universalizes women's experiences while ignoring racial disparities.

3.1.5. Scholarly Critiques and Intersectional Perspectives

Scholars, particularly Black and intersectional feminists, criticize *The Handmaid's Tale* for appropriating racial traumas without centering them. Ana Cottle argues the novel employs “white feminism,” using the historical brutalization of Black women—forced reproduction, family separation—to dramatize white Handmaids' suffering. Similarly, the Hulu adaptation's colorblind casting, where characters like Moira are portrayed as Black, has been critiqued for whitewashing Gilead's racism, presenting oppression as post-racial. In *Vulture*, Angelica Jade Bastién notes that the novel trades on slavery's legacy without acknowledging its racial specificity, a critique echoed in *The Guardian* and *NYLON*.

Intersectional feminist theory, as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, underscores how race and gender compound oppression, a dynamic Atwood gestures toward but underexplores. For example, while white Handmaids face sexual servitude, Black women, as “Children of Ham,” are denied even this “value,” facing exile or death. This hierarchy reveals how Gilead's patriarchy relies on racial exclusion, yet the novel's focus on Offred's gendered plight overshadows this intersection.

3.1.6. Cultural and Historical Parallels

Gilead's racial policies evoke real-world injustices, from apartheid's forced removals to the Holocaust's deportations and the United States' Trail of Tears. The



“Children of Ham” resettlement parallels the Bantustans, where Black South Africans were confined to marginalized territories. Similarly, the treatment of Jews mirrors Nazi policies of forced emigration or extermination, while the erasure of Native Americans recalls settler colonial genocides. These parallels enrich the novel’s dystopian warning but are undermined by their cursory treatment, as Atwood prioritizes gender over race.

3.2. Intersection of Race and Gender Oppression in *The Handmaid’s Tale*

In Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), the dystopian Republic of Gilead enforces a rigid patriarchal system that subjugates women through gendered roles, but this oppression is intricately tied to racial dynamics, revealing a compounded system where white supremacy bolsters patriarchal control. While gender oppression is universal in the novel—categorizing women into Handmaids (fertile breeders), Wives (elite companions), Marthas (domestic servants), and Unwomen (exiles)—race inflects these roles, prioritizing white women’s reproductive value while exiling or eliminating people of color. This paper explores the intersection of race and gender in Gilead, drawing on textual evidence, intersectional feminist theory, and scholarly critiques to argue that Atwood’s focus on gender oppression, while powerful, underdevelops the racial dimensions, perpetuating erasure and reflecting white feminist limitations. Through key references, such as the “Children of Ham” resettlement (p. 83) and the regime’s racial roots (p. 305), the analysis highlights how Gilead’s patriarchy relies on white supremacy, yet the novel’s limited engagement with race undermines its feminist critique.

3.2.1. Gendered Roles and Racial Hierarchy

Gilead’s gendered hierarchy is meticulously structured, with women assigned roles based on fertility, class, and compliance. Handmaids, like Offred, are fertile women forced into sexual servitude to produce children for elite Commanders, as Offred notes in Chapter 20: “We are for breeding purposes: we aren’t concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the flowering of secret lusts” (p. 144). The phrase “saving the race” in this context ostensibly refers to



human survival amid a fertility crisis, but in Gilead's racialized framework, it connotes white racial continuity. Only white women appear as Handmaids, their reproductive capacity valued to preserve a white elite, reflecting a eugenics-like obsession with racial purity.

In contrast, women of color face amplified oppression through exclusion. The "Children of Ham," a biblical allusion to Black people, are "resettled" to "National Homeland One" (p. 83), implying forced relocation or genocide. Unlike white Handmaids, Black women are deemed unworthy of even subservient roles, their fertility irrelevant in a regime fixated on white supremacy. This intersects with gender, as their exclusion from Handmaid status—however oppressive—condemns them to death or labor in the toxic Colonies, where "Unwomen" are sent (p. 248). Jewish women face similar intersectional violence, forced to convert or face "repatriation" to Israel, with Offred hinting at executions: "They said some Jews were drowned in the sea, during the repatriation" (p. 200). Their gender subjugation is compounded by antisemitism, denying them the "privilege" of reproductive servitude afforded to white women.

3.2.2. Offred's White Perspective and Racial Erasure

Offred's narrative, devoid of non-white Handmaids, underscores Gilead's racial homogeneity. Her world is white by default, allowing gender to dominate the narrative while race remains an unspoken undercurrent. This perspective normalizes the absence of diverse voices, mirroring white feminist tendencies to universalize women's experiences. For instance, Offred's reflections on her oppression—such as the anti-literacy laws ("We were not allowed to read," p. 174)—echo historical restrictions on enslaved Black women, yet she does not acknowledge these parallels. Similarly, the stripping of Handmaids' surnames, reducing them to "Of" their Commanders (e.g., "Offred"), recalls slave naming practices, but Atwood leaves this racial connection implicit.

This erasure is significant because it positions white women's suffering as the central feminist concern, sidelining the compounded oppressions faced by women of color. The novel's failure to include non-white Handmaids or explore their experiences reinforces a narrative where whiteness affords visibility and value, even within oppression. As scholars



note, this reflects a broader issue in white feminism, which often overlooks how race shapes gendered violence.

3.2.3. Intersectional Feminist Theory and Gilead's Power Dynamics

Intersectional feminist theory, particularly Kimberlé Crenshaw's framework, illuminates how race and gender intersect to produce unique forms of oppression. Crenshaw argues that Black women experience violence at the race-gender nexus, a dynamic Atwood gestures toward but does not fully explore. In Gilead, white Handmaids like Offred endure gendered violence—forced reproduction, surveillance, and loss of autonomy—but their whiteness grants them a perverse form of value within the regime's reproductive hierarchy. In contrast, Black and Jewish women are excluded from this system, facing exile or death, their gender oppression amplified by racial marginalization.

The Historical Notes provide crucial insight into this intersection. Professor Pieixoto notes that Gilead's policies "were firmly rooted in the pre-Gilead period, and racist fears provided some of the emotional fuel that allowed the Gilead take-over" (p. 305). This quote links racial anxieties—potentially white replacement fears—to the establishment of gendered control, suggesting that patriarchy thrives on racial division. Gilead's obsession with white births reflects historical eugenics movements, which tied white women's reproduction to racial preservation, as seen in early 20th-century policies promoting white population growth. By prioritizing white Handmaids, Gilead mirrors these ideologies, using gender oppression to enforce racial purity.

3.3.4. Scholarly Critiques and Adaptation Controversies

Scholars and critics argue that Atwood's underdeveloped racial narrative weakens the novel's feminist critique. Ana Cottle describes the novel as an example of "white feminism," appropriating Black women's historical traumas—such as forced breeding under slavery—while centering white women's suffering. The "Children of Ham" resettlement evokes slave trade deportations or apartheid's Bantustans, yet these parallels are not explored, leaving racial oppression as a backdrop to gender horror.

The Hulu adaptation (2017–present) amplifies these critiques through its colorblind casting, integrating people of color into Gilead without addressing the novel's racist framework. For



instance, Moira, portrayed as Black in the series but white in the book, embodies resilience, yet her story draws on Black slave narratives without acknowledging their racial specificity. Critics, such as those in *Vulture* and *The Verge*, argue this whitewashes Gilead's racism, presenting oppression as post-racial and diluting the novel's intersectional potential. The adaptation's inclusion of diverse characters, while inclusive on the surface, fails to confront the regime's white supremacist foundations, reinforcing the novel's erasure of racial narratives.

3.3.5. Historical and Cultural Parallels

Gilead's race-gender intersection mirrors real-world injustices. The "Children of Ham" resettlement recalls the forced removals of Black South Africans to Bantustans or the Trail of Tears for Native Americans, where racial exclusion intersected with gendered violence, such as the sterilization of Indigenous women. Jewish women's treatment in Gilead evokes Nazi antisemitism, where gender and religious identity compounded persecution. The novel's anti-literacy laws parallel those against enslaved Africans, who were denied education to maintain control, a gendered and racialized oppression. These historical echoes highlight how patriarchy often relies on racial hierarchies, yet Atwood's cursory treatment limits their exploration.

Culturally, *The Handmaid's Tale* resonates in contemporary debates on reproductive justice, where women of color face disproportionate restrictions. For example, Black and Indigenous women in the U.S. have historically endured forced sterilizations and higher maternal mortality rates, issues the novel's white-centric narrative overlooks. The Handmaid costume, a symbol of feminist resistance in protests, is critiqued for ignoring these racial disparities, reflecting the novel's own limitations.

3.3.6. Critiques and Cultural Impact

The Handmaid's Tale has faced significant critique for its handling of race, particularly from Black feminists who argue it appropriates racial traumas to dramatize white women's plight. In *Vulture*, Angelica Jade Bastien contends the novel trades on America's "greatest sin: slavery," applying Black women's brutalization—rape, child separation—to white Handmaids without acknowledging sources. This "painting oppression in white face" erases



the lived realities of women of color, as Alina Dee notes, drawing from Indigenous and Black histories like forced sterilization and family separations under slavery.

The Hulu series exacerbates this, with its diverse cast clashing with the book's racist regime. *The Week* describes it as a "worsening race problem," where non-white characters endure the same oppressions without addressing racial specificity. Ruth DeSouza argues the dystopia is "real life" for Black women, not speculative, highlighting how the novel universalizes white experiences.

Culturally, the novel's impact is profound, with Handmaid costumes symbolizing resistance in protests against abortion bans. However, critics like those in *Andscape* note this symbolism ignores how reproductive injustices disproportionately affect women of color. The 2019 sequel, *The Testaments*, attempts to address some critiques by expanding narratives, but the original's legacy remains tied to white feminism.

4. FINDINGS

This research paper investigates the intersection of race and gender in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), revealing how Gilead's patriarchal oppression is underpinned by white supremacy, yet the novel's limited engagement with race undermines its feminist critique. The analysis finds that while gender oppression is universal—categorizing women into Handmaids, Wives, Marthas, and Unwomen—racial dynamics amplify this subjugation. White women's reproductive value is prioritized, as seen in the regime's focus on "saving the race" (p. 144), which implicitly connotes white racial continuity. In contrast, Black women, referenced as the "Children of Ham" (p. 83), are exiled or eliminated, denied even the oppressive "privilege" of Handmaid status. Jewish women face forced conversion or deadly "repatriation" (p. 200), and Native Americans are erased entirely, implying genocide.

Offred's white perspective normalizes racial homogeneity, marginalizing non-white voices and reflecting white feminist tendencies to universalize gendered oppression. Intersectional feminist theory, particularly Kimberlé Crenshaw's framework, highlights how Black and Jewish women experience compounded violence at the race-gender nexus, a dynamic Atwood gestures toward but underexplores. The novel's anti-literacy laws and surname removal echo historical oppressions of enslaved Black women, yet these parallels are not centered,



appropriating racial trauma to amplify white suffering. The Historical Notes confirm that “racist fears” fueled Gilead’s rise (p. 305), linking patriarchy to white supremacy.

5. CONCLUSION

Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) is a powerful critique of gender oppression in the dystopian Republic of Gilead, where women are subjugated into roles like Handmaids, Wives, and Marthas under a patriarchal theocracy. However, its intersection with race reveals significant limitations in Atwood’s vision, as the novel’s focus on gender marginalizes racial narratives, undermining its universal feminist appeal. Through references like the “resettlement of the Children of Ham” (p. 83) and the regime’s racist foundations (p. 305), Atwood exposes how patriarchy interlocks with white supremacy, yet the sparse treatment of race weakens the critique. Intersectional feminist perspectives illuminate this gap, urging a reevaluation of the novel’s approach to compounded oppressions and its relevance to contemporary struggles.

Gilead’s gendered hierarchy—where women are stripped of autonomy and reduced to reproductive or domestic functions—is vividly dissected. Handmaids like Offred endure forced servitude, as seen in the Ceremony (p. 94), highlighting patriarchal control. Yet, racial dynamics reveal a deeper layer of oppression. The “Children of Ham” resettlement, a euphemism for the exile or genocide of Black people, evokes historical racial purges like apartheid’s Bantustans or Nazi deportations (p. 83). Similarly, the Historical Notes reveal that “racist fears provided some of the emotional fuel that allowed the Gilead take-over” (p. 305), linking white supremacist anxieties to patriarchal consolidation. These references suggest that Gilead’s oppression of women, particularly white Handmaids, is intertwined with a racial hierarchy that prioritizes white reproduction while eliminating non-white groups, such as Black and Jewish individuals, through “resettlement” or forced conversion (p. 200).

This intersection, however, is underdeveloped. Offred’s white perspective normalizes racial homogeneity, with no non-white Handmaids or significant characters of color, echoing white feminism’s tendency to universalize gendered experiences. Intersectional feminist theory, as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes how race and gender compound oppression, particularly for Black women, whose exclusion from Gilead’s reproductive roles underscores their disposability. The novel’s anti-literacy laws (p. 174) and surname removal parallel slave



practices, yet these racial echoes are not centered, appropriating Black trauma to amplify white suffering. Scholars like Ana Cottle critique this as “white feminism,” arguing that Atwood’s narrative borrows from marginalized histories without giving them voice, thus limiting its depth.

The novel’s relevance persists in contemporary politics, where reproductive restrictions and rising authoritarianism mirror Gilead’s dystopia. Protests using Handmaid costumes highlight its cultural impact, but critics note these symbols often ignore how reproductive injustices disproportionately affect women of color, such as higher maternal mortality rates among Black women. The Hulu adaptation’s colorblind casting further complicates this, integrating diverse characters without addressing Gilead’s racism, thus diluting its intersectional potential.

To combat such dystopias, feminism must embrace intersectionality, centering voices of color. Future scholarship should examine how *The Testaments* (2019) or adaptations address these gaps, fostering inclusive dystopian narratives. *The Handmaid’s Tale* warns of gendered tyranny and the dangers of ignoring race, urging a holistic fight for equality that acknowledges compounded oppressions.

6. WORKS CITED

Atwood, M. (1986). *The handmaid's tale*. Houghton Mifflin.