

Context of Handmaid's Tale

Slides 4-7

Maslofit Lecture

The Puritans

members of religious reform movement - Puritanism, Church of England, late 16th century
felt that they had a direct covenant with God
moved often → preventing them from forming deep rooted roots within communities

Harvard ditching The Puritans

→ project promoting inclusion and belonging
starchy New England colonialists
'editing history'

The Women's Rights Movement

Mistreatment of women is the number one human rights abuse

60-70's second wave of feminism

1963 - equal pay act

Abortion

Margaret Atwood - How she can write The Handmaid's Tale

writing about shifts towards policies aimed at controlling women, especially women's bodies and reproductive functions
feminist dystopia

Gilead - not superior men and inferior women → pyramid, powerful of both sexes at the apex,
men outranking women at the same level, descending levels of power and status
unmarried men → serve in the ranks before being awarded Economite.
trained for fertility, functional > decorative

Maslofit - The Handmaid's Tale

1. Political Influences - west Berlin, encircled by the Berlin Wall, Soviet Union strongly in place, totalitarian regime
US - political extremes, liberal intolerance, religious extremism, theocracy, old right ideology
2. Literary Influences - George Orwell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Huxley (Dystopian), speculative fiction, nothing that hasn't already happened, surveillance, gendered role play
3. Novel's Background - the feeling of being spied on, change of subjects