

Caputi, J. (2015). The color orange? Social justice issues in the first season of Orange is the New Black. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 48(6), 1130-1150.

Synopsis:

Caputi discussed OITNB's problematic representation of marginalized women, including black women, trans women, Latina women, low-income women, and mentally ill women. She noted that these women are often marked as "Other," especially in relation to Piper, the main character, whose white privilege marks her as more important than her peers. She also noted that the show often equates Piper's whiteness with innocence and purity and contrasts that image to non-white characters who are portrayed as dirty, deviant others. Caputi also argued that although the show does make visible the stories of marginalized women, it often does so by mediating those stories through Piper's whiteness. Caputi noted that the show does seem to acknowledge Piper's privilege, but ultimately it frames the story through it. Caputi discussed an example of Piper's inherent privilege in which Piper demonstrates psychological violence, but the show does not register it as such. Caputi also demonstrates the problematic nature of the show and Piper's white privilege by quoting Jenji Kohan, the show's producer, who noted that the stories of non-white women do not sell and that Piper becomes a Trojan horse through which those stories can be told.

Key Concepts

- **Prison Industrial Complex:** "The overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social, and political problems in the United States...helps and maintains the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic, and other privileges" (1131).
- **Gender entrapment:** "A pattern of being African American women 'marginalized in the public sphere because of their race/ethnicity, gender, and class' (1132).
- **Cultural imperialism:** "Universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm" (1133).

Key Quotes

- Jenji Kohan "You're not going to go into a network and sell a show on really fascinating tales of black women, and Latina women, and old women and But, if you instead sell them on the 'girl next door, the cool blonde,' you have a very easy access point... relatable for a lot of audiences and a lot of networks looking for a certain demographic" (1132).
- "Much feminist and queer criticism has worked to claim some aspects of popular culture as subversive of hegemonic norms. However, although OITNB intends to be progressive, it enacts cultural imperialism" (1133).
- "But, white, class privilege is continually, if subtly, reinforced, including by reserving key moments of viewer focus, identification, and empathy for Piper alone"(1136).

Essential Question

- In what ways do other shows mediate the stories of marginalized women through whiteness and why does this practice continue to happen?