

Gilead

What's left of the United States.

The Republic of Gilead is run by the Gileadites, an evangelical sect. The Gileadites consider surrogacy to be one of the most sacred things a woman can do. Sixteen-year-olds are strongly encouraged to become surrogates for infertile families. Some stay at home to do surrogacy, while others become Handmaids. A Handmaid lives with a good Christian family who keeps an eye on her, exposes her to more of the world, and gives her a chance to court some eligible boys, in exchange for her giving them a baby. In recent years, fertile female criminals have also become Handmaids to respectable families; the idea is that they rehabilitate her and she gives them children.

An exception to Gilead's general habit of harassing non-Christians is its creepily philo-Semitic attitude towards Jewish people. Jewish people are subject to different regulations, which are set by the ultra-Orthodox advisors to the Gileadite government. For example, ISPs censor different things for Jewish people than for non-Jewish people, and the government funds yeshivas.

Academia

Homeschooling is strongly encouraged, but many women don't homeschool. The Gileadites preserved the public school system, but changed it. Gileadite schools are Creationist, teach mandatory theology classes, teach abstinence-only sex education, and only let students read books that depict good moral character. Schools no longer teach the atheist lie of set theory.

Gilead has removed all government funding (including e.g. Pell grants) from colleges that teach heresies. Some schools, such as Harvard, stopped taking government funding. Some closed. Others moved to Cascadia, Canada, or (if a Catholic institution) Mexico. Still others, such as most state schools, accepted it and stopped teaching heretical things.

Censorship wasn't actually a large change for many schools. Teaching evolution in biology class was already iffy for any school that relied heavily on adjuncts, because all your students would give evaluations like "0/10, teaches heresies" if you tried. The humanities barely noticed the change, because it offered so much scope for "I'm just not going to teach a book that upsets all my students."

Biology departments are not allowed to teach about evolution. Essentially nowhere in Gilead has a good biology department; they teach Basically Medicine, Basically Agriculture, and Basically Wildlife Management. The land-grant universities have a renewed prominence.

In theory, mathematicians are not allowed to teach about infinities or set theory. In practice, while there are sincere finitists, mathematicians renamed infinities "Tao numbers" and kept going. Eyes do not generally understand math well enough to notice that this is happening. Every so often, an Eye asks about it, and the mathematician is like "no, infinities and Tao numbers are totally different, because Axiom of Choice Banach-Tarski discrete geometry Hilbert space," and the Eye backs away slowly and decides not to ask any more questions. There are sometimes whistleblowers, but the Eyes don't care that much and 98% of mathematicians are totally fine with being left alone and will swear up and down that Tao numbers and infinities are totally different. (Of course, you have to be careful talking about this with first-year PhD students-- they might have a crisis of faith.) There is a fair amount of math happening in Gilead, because the government will leave you alone.

If you are a Gileadite woman and want to become an academic, you marry a male academic. Ideally, you marry a male academic in your field, but it's not at all uncommon for a math professor to "publish philosophy" on the side. Gilead has a very strange number of polymaths! No one knows why! Sometimes people do better work in the field they aren't teaching in! Probably it is because of interdisciplinary research. As such, it is surprisingly important for Gileadite male academics to marry smart women and to be able to give talks on fields they don't actually know anything about.

Universities have adopted the policy that when academics go overseas for conferences the university posts the vacation fee.

Authoritarianism

Gilead has widespread censorship. People under 18 cannot access information about other religions from their own perspective, nudes including artistic nudes, information about sex, instructions about how to commit crimes, evolutionary biology textbooks, etc. Adults are not permitted to access pornography, non-Gileadite information about sex, information about contraception or abortion, instructions about how to commit suicide, etc. The Internet content filters are somewhat better than our universe's content filters-- they can tell if you're looking for information on breast cancer-- but stuff regularly slips through and sometimes an adult will have to complain to their ISP about not being allowed to see Michelangelo's David.

The Eyes of God ("Eyes") are the secret police. Eyes typically investigate crimes like treason and espousing heresy. They have a very good reputation, but in reality are kind of evil. The media reports their prosecutions as "brave Eye uncovers Cascadian resistance!", but actually a lot of their prosecutions are "Eye entraps an innocent person" or "politician framed for political reasons." All Commanders and other high-level executives have a secret Eye assigned to their staff.

Believing heretical things is not illegal. Publicly espousing heresy is illegal. Being an atheist or saying "I'm an atheist" is not illegal, but atheists cannot testify in court or run for political office. It is illegal to try to convince other people to be atheists. Certain publishing companies sell books that are basically the God Delusion, except that the last chapter is "...and also we know all of these are Atheist Lies because of the wisdom of the Bible, Amen."

If you try to leave Gilead, you have to post a vacation fee, which will be repaid when you come home; this is to prevent illegal emigration. Vacation fees range from the nonexistent (missionaries, politicians) to the nominal (unmarried men without particularly useful skills) to the exorbitant (fertile women). Most people get short-term loans for the vacation fee, which can be denied if the bank thinks you're going to try to emigrate. Gileadite financial systems are linked with the rest of the world's and can still hound you if you're not paying up.

Gender

Women working is not technically illegal. However, Gileadites have made many laws to 'protect' women: stringent sexual harassment law, limitations on how many hours women can work, requirements that women not have to lift more than fifty pounds, etc. These regulations are stringently enforced in gender-non-conforming professions and lightly enforced in gender-conforming professions. Nurses and gynecologists are almost universally female; many teachers and secretaries are female; many 'gig workers' are female. Middle-class to upper-middle-class women typically have home businesses, particularly if they have few or no children. Examples include teaching piano, writing fiction, tutoring, freelance journalism, programming, running a home daycare, and running an Etsy store. If you can imagine doing it remote, there's probably a Gileadite woman doing it.

Gilead has a surprisingly strong programming industry that is all remote work. It has finally solved the women in STEM pipeline problem.

Women are not supposed to teach men about theology; women are not allowed to write books about theology or preach. Women can teach children (in schools or at Sunday school). Women can teach non-theology subjects to men, but occasionally new converts or highly scrupulous people go overboard.

Homosexuality is illegal. Very affectionate homosociality, particularly if it is male, is usually viewed with suspicion. LGBT people are generally sent to inpatient ex-gay therapy. Ex-gay therapy typically includes individual and group therapy, prayer, Bible study, trauma work, family therapy (especially with adolescents), encouragement of nonsexual same-sex affection, training in heterosexual courtship, and explicit teaching about how to obey gender roles. Aversion therapy is uncommon but sometimes practiced, particularly for adolescents.

Race

The Gileadite sect was fully integrated by the 1980s (it turns out black people want babies as much as white people do). There are both historically-black and historically-white congregations, which have different preaching styles and use different hymns. Gilead has the normal range of opinions on race for Americans, ranging from “but what about black on black crime?” to “racism is the original sin of America.” Gileadites typically believe that racism and belief in evolution are deeply linked, even Gileadites who otherwise read as very liberal to us.

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