What is an Econowife?

Why do you think the Econowives also don’t like the Handmaids?

In flashbacks, Aunt Lydia keeps mentioning that different groups dislike the Handmaids, but need their understanding. Why do you think such a burden is on the Handmaids to understand?

Why do you think Econowives would be poor? What do you think it says about the society in Gilead that rich homes have Wives, Marthas, and Handmaids while poor homes have Econowives?

The Handmaid says that in the Commander’s house, “we all envy each other something.” Compare this to the Econowives. Which women do you think are in a better situation?

Translate *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*. Why do you think the previous Handmaid left this message?

The Handmaid tells us that songs such as *Amazing Grace* have been banned. What are three songs that you think would be banned in Gilead, and why do you think they would be banned?

In his book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Steven Pinker makes the (controversial to some) claim that violence has been falling over time, and today we live in a much less violent time. The following is a passage from the book:

"Cas Wouters, inspired by conversations with [Norbert] Elias late in his life, suggests that we are living through a new phase in the Civilizing Process. This is the long term trend of informalization I mentioned earlier, and it leads to what Elias called a "controlled decontrolling of emotional controls" and what Wouters calls third nature. If our first nature consists of the evolved motives that govern life in a state of nature, and our second nature consists of the ingrained habits of a civilized society, then our third nature consists of a conscious reflection on these habits, in which we evaluate which aspects of a culture's norms are worth adhering to and which have outlived their usefulness. Centuries ago or ancestors may have had to squelch all signs of spontaneity and individuality to civilize themselves, but now that norms of nonviolence are entrenched, we can let up on particular inhibitions that may be obsolete. In this way of thinking, the fact that women show a lot of skin or that men curse in public is not a sign of cultural decay. On the contrary, it's a sign that they live in a society that is so civilized that they don't have to fear being harassed or assaulted in response."[[1]](#footnote-1)

Compare this to Aunt Lydia’s explanation of why “*things*” used to happen to women in chapter 9. Steven Pinker seems to be arguing that if modesty was once required to protect people from violence, people have evolved beyond it. What do you think they believe about modesty in Gilead?

Why is the word “Sterile” forbidden in Gilead?

1. Pinker, Steven (2011) *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York. Viking Publishing. ISBN 978-0-670-02295-3(hardback). pg. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)