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Governmental Dystopia

George Orwell’s sixth novel, 1984, was published in 1949 and intended to warn its readers of the potential future. This was technically before the Cold War but many powerful American figures supported communism at the time. The author of 1984 had experienced the wrath of totalitarian government when he spent time in Spain and Russia. Orwell was horrified by the domination that the government was capable of having and the brutality that came along with it. This hate for an overly strong government and anxiety towards future communism in the West, drove George Orwell to write this dystopian novel.

 Winston Smith, the main character of the novel, is a low-ranking member of the Partyin London. The Party controls everything in the nation of Oceania. The Party watches and listens to everyone through telescreens. There are even people who are members of the “Thought Police” who can hear everything you’re thinking. Therefore the minds of citizens are controlled, along with the language. Memories of the past are erased and history is forgotten. The people are constantly reminded that “Big Brother is watching.”

 Throughout the novel it is apparent that Winston hates the Party. One day, Winston illegally buys a journal and writes down some of his criminal thoughts. Winston becomes fixated on another party member named O’Brien. He has a feeling that O’Brien is secretly a member of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is a group of people that citizens are brainwashed to absolutely despise because they attempt to overthrow Big Brother and the Party.

 Out of the four ministries (Truth, Love, Peace, Plenty), Winston works at the Ministry of Truth. His job is to alter historical records to match the Party’s version of past events. He notices a dark haired coworker there who really gets him paranoid. He feels as if she is a spy for the thought police but as the novel progresses, it is revealed she is in love with him (an unforbidden feeling). Winston and Julia begin covertly spending all time together, looking out for signs of party monitoring.

 One day, he receives a message from O’Brien asking to meet. The pair travels to see him and here O’Brien confirms that he too hates the party and works for the Brotherhood. He gives them the most forbidden item in Oceania (a copy of the Emmanuel Goldstein’s book) and indoctrinates them into the Brotherhood. Goldstein is the leader of the Brotherhood and the two are eager to check it out. However, when Winston is reading it to Julia one night, soldiers barge in and seize them. It turns out the man who sold Winston the diary and O’Brien are both spies who trapped Winston into committing an open act of rebellion against the party.

 The next months of Winston’s life are spent being tortured and brainwashed by O’Brien. Throughout the novel Winston has horrifying dreams about rats and it is obvious to the reader he is terrified by them. O’Brien knows this, and puts a cage of rats on Winston’s head to eat away at his face. Winston pleads with O’Brien to have it done to Julia instead.

This is the reaction O’Brien wanted. The party had won. O’Brien later sees Julia and has no love for her. He admits he loves Big Brother and is so brainwashed that he believes 2 + 2 = 5. I hated the ending to this novel, but like Orwell anticipated, I read it imagining how horrible life would be if America was currently like that.

In 1949, the novel without a doubt portrayed a potential future for America. Today, there is no doubt we will stay Democratic. However, many find that the power of the government is already too farreaching. People have thought that since the framing of the Constitution with disputes between Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Numerous aspects of the novel are comparable to the government today.

 We too have police officers that work to stop crime. Are ours so controlling that they monitor our thoughts? No. However, more and more laws are passed every week. Do we punish those who commit crimes? Yes. Would United States law enforcement ever be able to punish you with your worst fear? No. Most of the things that the government does in the novel, we do in a less extreme manner.

 London has a constitution just like us. Theirs is: “*WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.*” While we agree to follow ours because it is fair and what the founders of our nation wanted, the people of London are brainwashed to probably think the same. The Party alters their history and clears the memories of citizens so the present is never in question. A quote by George Santayana remains on the wall of Dachau Concentration Camp today: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." American students take history classes throughout their entire education and we have museums everywhere to remind us. The quote by Santayana is true and history is so central in America that altering and erasing the past would never be anything to worry about. While Santayana’s statement is factual, a power hungry organization, like the Party, intelligently uses the absence of history in its favor.

 America also has different sections of government like the government in 1984 does. We have the Legislative, Judicial, and Executive Branches. The Party has the Ministries of Truth, Love, Peace, and Plenty. Both governments divide into these sections because they cover different areas. The reason the United States branches are not as controlling is because we have Checks and Balances. Checks and Balances is a system that allows each branch of a government to amend or veto acts of
another branch in order to prevent any one branch from exerting too much power. The Party obviously does not have this in place because they desire absolute control.

The Party also created their own language so words that involve overthrowing their government cannot even exist. It is also illegal to write anything down. Fortunately, In the United States we have our First Amendment rights that allow us to say and express what we want.

Another thing lacking in London is privacy. Privacy is a nonexistent noun under the Party. Every thought, action, and facial twitch is monitored. Today, it seems Americans desire more and more privacy but receive less. People on house arrest wear an ankle bracelet that tracks their location and they have parole officers that check up on them. When one is accused of committing a crime, police can check their computer history and cell phone or credit card records. This is nowhere near as bad as the telescreens watching your every move in 1984, but it shows that our government is capable of watching and today we do have those technologies to do so.

All in all, today it is hard to imagine being worried about communism after reading 1984. But if I read it in 1949, I would have undoubtedly feared the future. George Orwell definitely portrayed the atrocious aspects of a government with total control appropriately. There are many aspects of the Party’s government that we have in our society but less severely. On the other hand, there are other characteristics of their government that I know could never happen because of the Constitution we have in place. 1984 is definitely a plausible dystopian novel that everyone should read to realize how fortunate we are and how potentially different life could be.