

Professor says '1984' not here

by Bonnie Langford
Battalion staff

When George Orwell chose the title "1984" for his book, he apparently had nothing specific in mind. The date merely was the reverse of the year in which he was writing: 1948.

But the dramatic and lasting impact of the book turned 1984 into a sinister symbol of a society gone awry. And now 1984 is only days away.

The book has become a popular addition in college courses across the nation. At Texas A&M, Dr. Richard Costa is using it as one of the two major works of fiction studied in his English 103 honors class.

"I wanted a book that would shake people up, one that builds around the ideas of obedience and disobedience," he says. "Students are too willing to accept what they are told without questioning it, as do the characters in '1984'. And of course, the fact that next year is 1984 made it very tempting to pick the book."

Although the year creeps ominously closer, Costa says that most of the events foretold in the book haven't yet come true in the United States.

"I don't believe that '1984' is here in the U.S. yet," he says, "but I wanted to get the students looking ahead and trying to see what tendencies might surface in the future."

People in the United States

"I don't believe that '1984' is here in the U.S. yet, but I wanted to get the students looking ahead and trying to see what tendencies might surface in the future." — English professor Richard Costa.

can live without the fear of being monitored with screens and without the fear of being caught writing in a diary because it's against the law, but Costa says he feels Americans have become complacent about other countries.

"We settle for geographic distance and are not emotionally involved in Beirut or Afghanistan," he says. "We can't allow the geographic distance to serve as a telescreen or a distorting device, as in '1984'."

Not caring about people who are in different countries is one danger that the United States must change, Costa says. America is beginning to live in its own

Oceania, he says. This isolationism has cropped up previously. It was a problem before World War II.

"Despite the fact we're in a recession and the unemployment rate is high," he says,

"there is money and we are well-off. It's not as bad as it could be."

Costa says people in the United State are more fortunate than those dwelling in Oceania because no one is under the threat of being vaporized. Repression or the threat of rewritten history doesn't exist, he says, but that is not the case in other countries.

"There are places where '1984' does exist," he says. "There are people in Afghanistan and Argentina who are imprisoned and then disappear. We're very fortunate that we can still determine the characteristics of our own lives."

One of Costa's assignments

for his students included writing an essay comparing Orwell's book to other anti-Utopian books. He chose 10 essays for a class casebook.

The casebook, called "The Future in Peril: '1984' and the Anti-Utopians," includes essays on such science fiction greats as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

Tim Grose, a freshman in Costa's class, says "1984" is here, but it isn't as bad as Orwell predicted.

"The government in the U.S. has gotten extremely large, just as in the book," Grose says. "We even have some doublethink in today's political candidates. They often just say what they think the people want to hear, even if they don't believe it. Or they don't even think about what they are really saying."

People also are conforming to the ideas of society, he says, but it isn't Big Brother who is forcing this conformation. People want to be part of the group, he says.

Big Brother does exist in the Soviet Union, Grose says, because people have become almost exactly like the society depicted in "1984."

"The book does apply to-

day's society," he says. "The signs are here and we're going to have to work on preventing '1984' from happening in the U.S., but the book leaves no hope. It's too pessimistic. I'm a little more optimistic about our future."

Kepler Johnson, another student in the class, agrees that the communist countries are becoming similar to the society portrayed in the book.

"America seems to have taken heed from the book," he says. "China is still in revolt, so we don't know which way they're heading, but the other communist block countries are living '1984' now. Russia has Big Brother; it even has the KGB as the Thought Police."

People in the communist countries aren't allowed to think for themselves, Johnson says, and they live in fear of the government.

Doug Kennedy, also a class member, says he believes the United States and Soviet Union are too close to "1984" already.

"Russia is probably closer to becoming Big Brother than we are," Kennedy says. "Russia is treating the people like Big Brother."

Orwellian society not reflected in real 1984

by Angel Stokes
Battalion staff

"Progress in our world will be progress toward more pain ... there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement ... everything else we will destroy ... we have cut links between child and parent ... there will be no wives and no friends ... the sex instinct will become eradicated ... procreation will be an annual formality like the renewal of a ration card ... no loyalty, except loyalty to the party ... no love, except the love of Big Brother ..."

That's 1984, according to George Orwell's book. In "1984" society is an extension of the state — a state that has complete control.

In Oceania, the setting for "1984," sex is utilitarian, independent thought or emotion is illegal and Big Brother is watching you all the time. The Junior Anti-Sex League advocates complete celibacy for both sexes. Eventually, all children would be created through artificial insemination.

In Orwell's book, the family — subservient to the Party — exists only to have children. Husbands and wives are approved by the Party before a marriage takes place. The children are sent to school and are trained to be spies for the Party.

But today's American society

— with 1984 just a few weeks away — isn't much like Orwell predicted when he wrote the book in 1948.

Instead, people have more freedom to express themselves and their emotions, and the family still is a functioning unit.

Three theories exist today about the relationship between family and state, Burk says. These are: the family is subservient to the state, the state is subservient to the family and the state and the family are completely separate from one another.

In the U.S. the state is subservient to the family, he says. But all three theories exist in society now. The theory of greatest controversy is the third, he says.

An example is a parent's decision to withhold medical treatment for children with terminal illnesses and the government steps in. In cases like this, parents may feel that the state should stay out and remain separate from the decision.

The family unit is not the only thing that differs from Orwell's 1984 as compared to the real 1984.

Over the past 50 years or so, people have become more sexually liberal, says Dr. James Burk, a Texas A&M sociologist.

Since the end of World War II, an increase in sexual freedom

has occurred. However, he says 1980 values are more traditional than the early '70s but more liberal than the '60s.

But, can groups like the Moral Majority be compared to the Junior Anti-Sex League that Orwell envisioned?

Burk says the Moral Majority and other groups aren't trying to change morality. The groups want to affirm what they think is traditional morality, he says, instead of a world where sexual practice is a matter of licentiousness or wholly utilitarian.

"They (the groups) over-react," Burk says. "Americans aren't licentious and they aren't utilitarian either."

Religious groups are increasing their efforts in public affairs, Burk says. The authority of the church over public affairs is much less now than 100 or 200 years ago. But the institutional authority of the church is down — but not out, he says.

Orwell created a society without religion. God and Satan existed in the guise of ever-watchful Big Brother. The Party slogans were the religious doctrines.

Burk says he doesn't think it's possible for a society to exist without some type of transcendental beliefs.

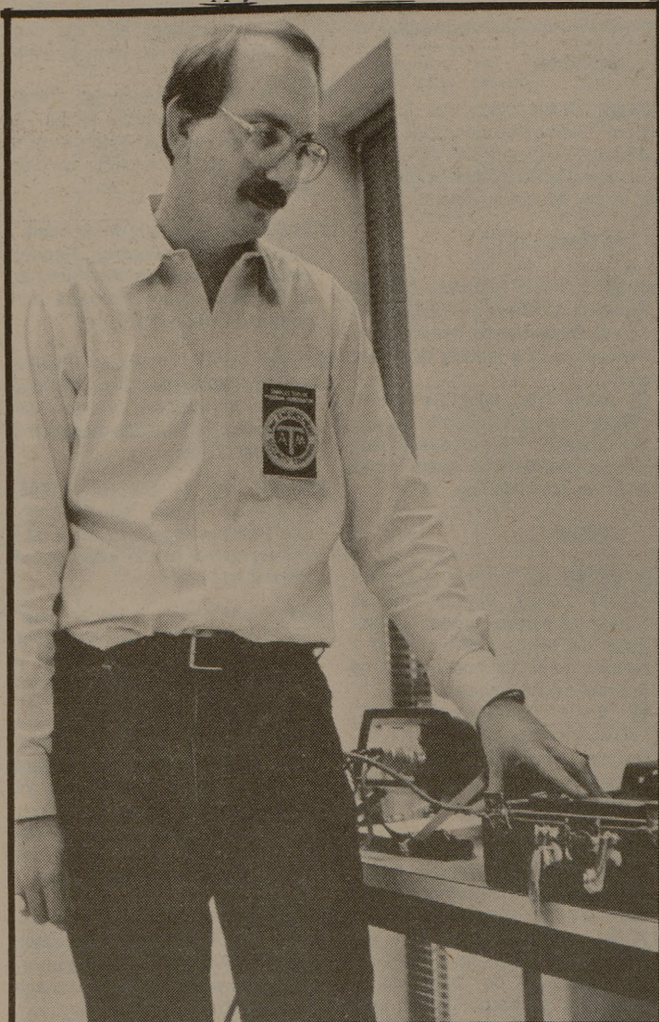


photo by Bonnie Langford

"Bugging" equipment

Charles L. Taylor, president of Data Loss Prevention Inc., displays equipment used in an electronic eavesdropping course. The course is offered by the Texas A&M Law Enforcement and Security Training Center. (See related story, page 9.)