

As 1984 rapidly approaches, the prophecies of author George Orwell are being examined anew. Big Brother, Thought Police, Newspeak, Double Think. Some of the concepts created by Orwell in his book "1984" — written in 1948 — have become standard phrases in American life.

The phrase Big Brother has become synonymous with oppression and Thought Police conjures up visions of KGB-like government agents and brain-washing.

In the book, Big Brother was a symbol for the oppressive government of Oceania. Big Brother saw everything (with the help of telescreens that that essentially spied on people while broadcasting information), heard everything, knew everything and controlled everything, including thought, speech and writing. The Thought Police spied for the Party and enforced

thought-control and brain-washing.

"1984" chronicles the efforts of Winston Smith, the central character, to rebel against the government, think for himself and fall in love — something not approved by the Party. Winston fell in love anyway, but he feared capture and torture.

Eventually, the Thought Police caught up with him. After extensive emotional and physical torture, Winston's rebellion was gone. He accepted what the Party told him. He loved Big Brother.

Following Winston's experiences with Big Brother may make the hackles on your neck rise. It's scary to think people can be controlled that way. But in some places, on a smaller scale, some of this control already exists. In the following articles, we've provided instances and incidents that bring to mind "1984." Is it here? You be the judge.

History: can it be altered?

by Lauri Reese
Battalion staff

"And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed — if all records told the same tale — then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.' And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. 'Reality control,' they called it; in Newspeak, 'doublethink.'" — George Orwell, "1984."

The "Party" is the political, social and economic group in Oceania, the setting of the novel, to which all people above lower class belong.

Newspeak is the official language of Oceania.

In "1984," Winston Smith works at the Records Department "rectifying" newspapers. He corrects "slips, errors, misprints, or misquotations which it is necessary to put right in the interests of accuracy."

Smith is part of a continuous alteration applied to newspapers, books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets — "to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance."

Couldn't happen today.

Couldn't?

Except for the time when those people in the Soviet Union who owned a particular Soviet

encyclopedia were sent in the mail an article about the Bering Sea to paste over the entry about Lavrenti Pavlovich Beria.

This is rewriting history in the classic Orwellian sense, says Dr. Chester Dunning, an associate professor of history at Texas A&M.

Beria attempted to seize power at the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and was shot by Communist leaders.

Or what about when Leon Trotsky, a former Russian war minister, was totally wiped from Russian history? Dunning asks.

He says Trotsky was a very important man but because of his rivalry with Stalin and eventual murder, his contribution is not mentioned and he is blacked out of official pictures.

Dr. Donald Pisani, associate professor of history, says that in the late 1950s, a period characterized by anti-Stalin sentiment in the Soviet Union, Stalin all but disappeared from the pages of Russian history.

In 1961, Stalin's body was removed from Moscow's Red Square, a place of great honor, and was reburied within the Kremlin walls among the graves of lesser heroes. His name was removed from public buildings, streets and factories. The city of Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd.

Dunning says that in the Soviet Union, there are fulltime historians doing nothing but rewriting history to show the people coming to power, to show the Communist Party leading the people, and to show the inevitability of the revolution.

Rights questioned

by Lauri Reese
Battalion staff

Freedom of expression — guaranteed for all in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

In "1984" by George Orwell, Emmanuel Goldstein is the "commander of a vast shadowy army, an underground network of conspirators dedicated to the overthrow of the State." He is the "enemy of the people," an "object of hatred," because he is filling minds with "pitiful rubbish," he is "advocating freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of thought."

"We tend to take freedom for granted," says Dr. Donald Pisani, associate professor of history at Texas A&M.

Many people would rather be slaves than free, he says, as long as they are enslaved by the right leader. The instinct for freedom is not at all clear when placed beside the need for security.

Dr. Chester Dunning, associate professor of history, says that many freedoms have been given up out of fear.

Pisani says the responsibility of freedom includes using your brain rather than letting the state make decisions for you.

The constitution of the Soviet Union guarantees almost all the same freedoms guaranteed in the United States Constitution, Dunning says.

"It's all there in print," he says, "but in reality, it's pure fiction."

The freedom of travel is restricted and the freedom of the press is almost nonexistent in the Soviet Union because it never has existed, he says. A large segment of the population doesn't demand it like in the United States, Dunning says.

"It is convenient and possible to impose the official view in the Soviet Union and the people don't care that they are not hearing the full truth because they have never known the full truth," he says.

In a country where the people have never had the chance to vote and censorship has always been the norm, freedom is defined very differently than in the United States, he says.

Dunning says Americans may lose their freedom by default. When people are not paying attention, freedom slips away, he says.

Dr. Edward Smith, associate professor and head of the communications department, says less than 10 percent of other countries have freedom

of expression similar to the United States, he says. The norm is substantial governmental control.

Smith says the more uneasy and paranoid a country is, the more fears of freedom of expression exist.

In "1984," the main character "had set his features into the expression of quiet optimism which it was advisable to wear."

"To dissemble your feelings, to control your face, to do what everyone else was doing, was an instinctive reaction," Orwell says.

One history professor at Texas A&M tells of the time she travelled to the Soviet Union and decided to relax for a few minutes in Moscow's Gorky Park. She sat on a bench next to an older woman and began speaking to her in halting Russian.

The professor told the woman how beautiful she thought Russia was and how much she loved the subways and the park. Trying to bait the woman, she said, "Everyone seems so happy with the present situation. I haven't heard anyone complain. Everyone just seems so content."

The older woman turned to look at the professor and said, "And if they weren't, how would you know?"

