

Throughout my life, I have been fascinated by dystopian fiction novels. It all started when I first read *The Hunger Games*. If you are unfamiliar with the story, the novel tells a tale of a country, where, in order to keep peace among the districts, two children would be chosen from each district to fight to the death against the others. This was said to be a reminder of the bloodshed from a war fought a century before. I also enjoyed reading the *Divergent* series, about a futuristic society in which each person may only fit into one of five categories: kind, smart, brave, honest, or selfless. Anyone who fit more than one was considered dangerous, and must be eliminated.

Now, as a twelve or thirteen year old, it never occurred to me that books like these were supposed to be a warning about what our future could entail. After all, no one is being forced to fight to the death in Clear Lake, Iowa, and I am encouraged to be kind, smart, brave, honest, and selfless. Surely, we are not in danger of falling into such injustice that would lead to that extreme of an outcome. Of course, this is the same way readers thought about certain dystopian novels almost a century ago. What is most concerning regarding this topic is the obvious connection between these old books and our modern day society. Most thought these ominous, apocalyptic novels were complete fantasy, and a reality of that kind seemed unimaginable in the time they were written. But as the works of fiction aged, the themes inside of them resembled reality more and more. Could it be that the same will happen with books like *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*?

Today, my goal in writing to you is to show how certain themes from dystopian fiction are present and relevant today. More precisely, three themes from the books *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Brave New World* are present and often glorified in modern day American society. Based on these three themes, I want to convey to you that the United States of America is in

danger of falling into an era of apathetic wickedness and proud godlessness, if we do not take action to change soon. Now, I have decided to stick to these three works of literature exclusively, for the sake of brevity and to avoid overreaching into extensive research. These works of literature were all also written within about twenty years of each other, and each author depicts their idea of a dystopia in their own distinctive manners. The three main subjects I will be focusing on are happiness, pleasure, and indoctrination. Again, these are just a few of the major themes that I have found to be relevant to this discussion, and there are numerous others that could be explored and analyzed. But, for this occasion, we will focus on these three.

Throughout this thesis, we will be hearing the word dystopian used quite frequently. A dystopia is defined according to Merriam-Webster as “an imagined world or society in which people lead wretched, dehumanized, fearful lives.” So a dystopian fiction is one where everything is bad- this being in contrast to a utopia, a world or society where everything is perfect. Jill Lepore, author and professor of American history at Harvard, writes that “the argument of dystopianism is that perfection comes at the cost of freedom.” In a dystopia, hope is generally lost among the people, and leaders care more about control than they do about the individual citizens. These kinds of leaders are considered totalitarian. You will also hear this word throughout this thesis and it is defined as “something of or relating to a political regime based on subordination of the individual to the state and strict control of all aspects of the life and productive capacity of the nation especially by coercive measures (such as censorship and terrorism).” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2023)

Before delving into the themes from these works of literature, I first want to give you a brief background of the books and their authors. Imagine an environment in which the government had so much control that they could force you to believe that war is peace, that

freedom is slavery, and that ignorance is strength. Not only is information controlled, but also individual thought and memory. This is the state of the world in George Orwell's fiction, *1984*.

The book's protagonist, Winston Smith, is an Outer Party official living in a London that is still shattered by a nuclear war that took place not long after World War II. As a member of the Outer Party, his job is to help control the truth. Specifically, Winston's job is to rewrite history in the Ministry of Truth, bringing it in line with current political thinking. This political thinking always benefits and brings glory to Big Brother, the lord of the people, who is always watching them, yet is never seen. Reading *1984*, it is evident that Winston is one of the few people left that secretly detests Big Brother and his totalitarian rule of the people.

Throughout the book, we see Winston rebelling against Big Brother. Initially, Winston begins to write in a journal, a crime punishable by death. He continues his rebellion throughout the story by actions of "thoughtcrime," love affairs, and finally, joining an anti-Party brotherhood. In the end, this brotherhood turns out to be a ploy to catch Winston in his rebellion. The Party soon arrests Winston, and uses means of torture, force, and mind manipulation to make him believe that he actually loves Big Brother. After he admits this belief, the book ends with a Party member sending a bullet through Winston's head, a final display of Big Brother's absolute control. Orwell wrote *1984* in 1948 as a warning to readers of the dangers of totalitarianism, after the tragedy of World War II. His work grows more pertinent as time goes on.

The second book we will be discussing is Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Now I want to take you to a different world. Imagine that you are a fireman. Your job is to respond to emergency calls by putting out fires. Right? Actually, Bradbury's work of literature defines firemen a little bit differently. The main character, Guy Montag, is a fireman. But his job is not

to put out fires. On the contrary, Montag's job is to destroy the most illegal of commodities, the printed book, using fire.

*Fahrenheit 451* tells us the story of an oppressive society that attempts to eliminate all sources of complexity, contradiction, and confusion to ensure uncomplicated happiness for all its citizens. Montag eventually learns that books are not an inherent evil, and analogous to *1984*, he rebels against the government's rule. Bradbury wrote *Fahrenheit 451* in 1953 as a message to humanity about the importance of knowledge and identity in a society so easily corrupted by ignorance and distraction.

Our final piece of literature that we will discuss is *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. Huxley's novel depicts a futuristic society, called the World State, that revolves around science and efficiency. Emotions and individuality are conditioned out of children at a young age in order to produce a civilization of proper order and harmony. Advanced technology is used for the purpose of creating a race of people who are numbed into an artificial sense of happiness.

In slight contrast to our other novels, the main characters don't revolt against the World State as an act of political rebellion. Rather, the first protagonist, Bernard Marx, wants change simply because he doesn't fit in; he wants to have the freedom to be unhappy. Huxley's second protagonist comes from the undeveloped portion of the world, John the Savage. Being unaccustomed to this Brave New World, John is brought into the World State. Despite great opposition, John eventually succumbs to their ideals, and allows the pursuit of pleasure to overtake his morality. Huxley wrote *Brave New World* between World War I and II, an era of advancing technology. His goal in writing was to paint a picture of what he imagined society would come to if science and technology continued to progress as they were.

So how prophetic were these three authors? Certainly, we don't live in a country where war is peace, books are evil, or pleasure is morality. Right?

The United States of America: a nation founded on liberty, justice, and equality. Our Founding Fathers enshrined freedom, limited government, and individual responsibility in the Declaration of Independence, our nation's most powerful and revolutionary piece of writing. Brave men fought strenuously in the Revolutionary War against Great Britain, so that a new nation, with a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, could arise. How far has our country evolved from this fateful time in history? And is that a good or a bad thing? Well, our three authors have made it very clear what their answers to this question are. So let's begin with our first theme from these books that we will concentrate on.

Indoctrination is defined as “the process of repeating an idea or belief to someone until they accept it without criticism or question.” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2023) Throughout the three books, this theme of indoctrination, specifically regarding children, is terribly present. In fact, most of the controlling powers in these fictions rely immensely on this type of control. An excerpt from *1984* reads:

Nearly all children nowadays were horrible. What was worst of all was that by means of such organizations as the Spies they were systematically turned into ungovernable little savages, and yet this produced in them no tendency whatever to rebel against the discipline of the Party. On the contrary, they adored the Party and everything connected with it... All their ferocity was turned outwards, against the enemies of the State, against foreigners, traitors, saboteurs, thought-criminals. It was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children. (Orwell, *1984*, pg. 24)

In *1984*, the Party uses indoctrination to disrupt the normal state between parents and children. They teach children to respect only the Party and Big Brother, and encourage them to turn in their parents for thoughtcrime. This results in a lack of discipline, because parents fear

being turned in to the police. Further, the children are taught hatred and aggression toward enemies at an early age. All of this makes them “ungovernable little savages.” (pg 24)

On an even greater extreme, *Brave New World* uses technological conditioning to force children to believe whatever ideas the governing powers choose. For example, a quote from the Director from the conditioning center reads: “We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future...’ He was going to say ‘future World Controllers,’ but correcting himself, said ‘future Directors of Hatcheries’ instead.” (pg 13) In this novel, human beings are made to believe they belong to certain parts of society, from Epsilons, the lowest caste who perform the most menial of tasks and lack intellectual capacity, to the Alphas, the highest caste with the highest level jobs and most mental development. The path of everyone’s lives are predetermined for them before they are even born. Furthermore, Huxley goes on to write in the novel that “that is the secret of happiness and virtue—liking what you’ve got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny.” (pg 16)

At a first glance, these themes from our works of literature may not seem relevant to today’s American society. We certainly are not technologically conditioning children to take specific occupations in society, but to what extent are we indoctrinating our children?

According to the *U.S. Department of Education*, from the age of five to eighteen, 90% of children spend most of their waking hours in a public school. The main goals of American public education are to prepare students academically, to prepare students for work, and to prepare students to be good citizens. But over time, the public education system has drifted further from these goals, and nearer to a kind of construction found in *1984* and *Brave New World*. A major controversial topic among Americans today is the subject of gender ideology. This topic has

undoubtedly found its way into politics, and even more worrying, into our children's schools. According to the *United States National Sex Education Standards*, developed by supposed experts and advocacy groups, gender identity is one of the seven essential topics of sex education. Seven states require that curriculums include LGBTQ topics, and the federal government strongly recommends this inclusion as well. This political agenda is being taught to children, whether their parents agree with it or not.

From Sarah Dogan and Peter Collier's book *Leftist Indoctrination in our K-12 Public Schools*, their research has found that in Washington, at the age of eight, children are to be introduced to the topic of gender identity, and to the idea that they can choose their own gender. A view that has recently emerged among the leftist population, which fundamentally ignores basic truths about identity and biology. They also found that sixth graders at a middle school in Florida were given a survey by their teacher that included explicit questions on sexuality and race. They were given prompts such as, "A friend invites you to go to a gay bar," or "Your mother comes out to you," and were to express how comfortable they would be with each situation. Is this kind of teaching preparing children to be good citizens, or is it indoctrinating them to believe certain ideologies based on political bias?

Another subject of child indoctrination in the United States has to do with race theory and social justice topics. For example, Dogan and Collier's study also found that an Oklahoma high school teacher was recorded teaching that "To be white is racist, period." More of their research uncovers that an elementary school teacher in Minnesota, "had reported on her page that 'students of color' had experienced 291 'microaggressions' in a 90 day period, meaning that they had been encouraged by the school's racialized atmosphere to convert imagined slights all around them into instances of white racism and to inform on their fellow students." (pg 6)

Indoctrination of children is not only found in fictional works like *1984* and *Brave New World*. It is present everywhere. Children are being taught political ideologies in public schools, whether the parents like it or not. Does this not resemble the conditioning of children talked about in *Brave New World*? Or the indoctrination of kids by the Party to love Big Brother in *1984*? Children in public schools today are being conditioned to believe ideologies that will train them to think a certain way as adults. This is a prominent issue that George Orwell and Aldous Huxley were trying to warn readers of for the future. Now is the time to take heed of these prophetic dystopian themes and to veer away from them.

The next theme from our three books we will focus on is the exaltation of pleasure and happiness. A quote from Captain Beatty, a fellow fireman with Montag, reads:

We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man's mind. Who knows who might be the target of the well-read man? (Bradbury, pg 58)

The goal of the government in *Fahrenheit 451* is to censor knowledge by banning books and controlling information. Their reason for this is to keep the people ignorant and happy. Books can give people conflicting ideas, make people worry, and provide superior intellect. How can everyone remain equally happy if not everyone is equally ignorant and equally stuffed full of distractions? That is the injustice of the government in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. They control the people by controlling the media and the entertainment, and by giving them no choice but to enjoy the endless entertainment and to believe whatever it tells them.

This theme is inflated in *Brave New World*. The World Controllers give the people every kind of pleasure they can think of. In fact, they condition them to glorify it. In their eyes, the stability of society is largely dependent on the happiness of the citizens. If the people are even



slightly unhappy, then the entire system will come crashing to a halt. This ideology, in action, provides the people with constant superficial entertainment, an endless cycle of overconsumption, ceaseless opportunity for sexual relations with anybody they want, and the infamous soma, a drug that can and will cure any feelings of unhappiness an individual feels.

This exaltation of pleasure and happiness among the population is not something unique to dystopian fictions. In the United States of America, as science and technology have increased, so have entertainment, overconsumption, and promiscuity.

According to a study done by MIDia research, the average American consumer spends approximately 4.5 hours per day on entertainment. As stated by this study, “Allocating eight hours of work and seven hours of sleep, consumers then have about 4.5 hours per day left to do things like eat, commute, socialize, run errands, and conduct general life admin.” This study shows that on average, all of a standard American’s downtime is spent consuming some kind of entertainment. From television to video games to music, Americans have no lack of media to keep them entertained. This constant entertainment, in turn, keeps us constantly distracted.

Furthermore, Lea Bdeir, a writer from the University of Beirut, examines our country’s obsession with the Hollywood celebrity. Why is it that we know hardly anything about the current events going on in the world, yet we stay up to date with what Kim Kardashian wore to the Grammys? According to Bdeir, the reason for this is that, “We are consumers in a consumerist society and have been feeding into the illusion that we should obsess and idolize people who, until recent years, were not even diverse or remotely interesting.” The media has created an industry that knows how to keep the people entertained, and this knowledge may come to ruin us. People are becoming less interested in subjects of importance, and more infatuated with the newest trends.

This obsession with celebrities has only arisen since the three dystopian fictions have been written. In fact, it is a common belief that the CIA initiated this obsession in the 1960's by using anti-war musicians to promote drug culture. Of course, the CIA has not made a statement regarding this theory. But was the government involved in the birth of celebrity obsession? The media has done much to manipulate certain views of celebrities for certain political gains. This is seen for example, when Taylor Swift endorsed two Democratic Congressional candidates in 2018; this endorsement was followed by 212,000 citizens newly registering to vote.

By staying distracted and ignorant of important current events, the people are therefore "happier" because they don't understand the truth. This is the prominent theme from *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451*, and it is being mirrored more and more in American culture as time passes.

The United States is also notorious for overconsumption, another major problem found in the World State of *Brave New World*. A common cliché spoken throughout the book goes "The more stitches the less riches," (pg 49) a phrase meant to remind the people that the more they repair, the less they buy, therefore resulting in less money in the economic system, and less stability and happiness for the citizens. Huxley had begun to see that overconsumption had started to become a second nature for people living in the modern world. Through his writing, it is evident that it was not hard for Huxley to imagine how this kind of consumerism would escalate over time.

Today, the United States is the world's largest consumer economy. According to enterprises.gov, "Its household spending is the highest in the world, accounting for nearly a third of global household consumption. On average, US households consume nearly three times as much as any other country in the world." Furthermore, a typical American citizen is exposed to

about 4,000-10,000 advertisements daily, a number that is only increasing with technology.

While consumerism has always been a component of our economy, American's have massively increased their spending in the last century. Why? Why does it seem that we are becoming more and more materialistic and consumerist as time passes? Could it be that our government keeps the people buying, in order to keep them happy and distracted?

The last subject regarding pleasure and happiness that we will discuss is a theme addressed in *1984*, and encountered abundantly in *Brave New World*. This is the theme of promiscuity among citizens. In Orwell's *1984*, sexuality is something that has to be entirely suppressed and ultimately warped into a forced love for Big Brother. In contrast, Huxley's *Brave New World* portrays sex as a form of distraction and pacification for citizens. The goal of the World Controllers is to eliminate all emotion from these acts so that loyalty to the state is never in competition with loyalty to an individual. The saying in *Brave New World* goes, "Everyone belongs to everyone else." (page 43) While both dystopias distort sex to an extreme far from what God intended it to be, our society tends to lean more towards Huxley's version of promiscuity. In the last century, Americans have become increasingly licentious in regards to their own bodies. Television, entertainment, and social media have become permeated with sexual innuendo, images, and situations. Hook-up culture has taken a prominent lead on young people's approaches to partnership, with now only 3% of people waiting until marriage to pursue intimate relations.

Whether we like it or not, we live in a culture where people's actions demonstrate a *Brave New World*, where "Everybody belongs to everybody else." As shown in Huxley's writing, the more that sex pervades every aspect of culture, the less important it becomes, and the less emotion attached to it. This was the exact goal of the World Controller's in Huxley's book.

Upon reflection, it can be quite frightening to see the correlation between this fictional dystopian world and our own.

This leads me into some of my own objections to my thesis. Although the world we live in often looks synonymous with these dystopian apocalyptic narratives, there is one truth that all three of these authors failed to recognize. That there is hope, because humanity has been offered salvation and redemption through Jesus Christ. We live in a fallen world, where evil runs rampant and society turns away from God. Children are being indoctrinated, people are numbing themselves with entertainment, consumerism is creating massive waste on the earth, and young people are being led into a culture of promiscuity. As long as human beings walk on earth, dystopia is inevitable.

Christian author Mike Duran states it this way, “The genre of dystopian books...reinforces a vital biblical theme — *Man is broken*. No amount of moral or technological ‘tweaks’ can correct... Us.” Duran argues that the more we try to create a utopia, the more dystopian our world becomes. This truth has been demonstrated abundantly throughout history, most clearly in the events of WWII. Human beings cannot be perfect, and the more they try, the more they will fail. These dystopian fictions depict a world where humanity and the individual is devalued. It is discouraging to read these horrendous tales of suffering and injustice in correspondence with modern day American society.

But on the contrary, as Christians, we do not have to be disheartened. We are called as followers of Christ to have faith in the Lord, and to eagerly await the day when He will bring us back to Him. Isaiah 40:31 says, “But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” To put a more optimistic perspective on this thesis, it has occurred to me that the mere

fact that these dystopian fictions are so renowned and regarded should give us a renewed sense of hope. As long as we can recognize these ideologies and realities as inherently evil, there is still hope that we can make a change, before it gets to that point. If dystopian fictions did not make readers tremble a little, or if people were not even allowed to read them, then we might say that we have made it all the way to a world of totalitarian dystopia. But we are able to understand and discuss these dangers, a freedom that none of the characters of the three books had.

In the United States, God has blessed us with an abundance of liberty. The one main difference between our society and the societies of *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Brave New World* is that we still have a choice. Although, to a large number of people, it may seem that we are being controlled in different matters, we ultimately have the right to choose for ourselves how we will live our lives. While many schools are indoctrinating their children, parents still are given the right to choose other options. While entertainment has begun to overtake our society's ability to think reasonably, citizens are given the right to turn the TV off, and to sit down and read a book. Although consumerism runs rampant in our culture, people are given the right to live a more simplistic, conservative lifestyle.

When it comes down to it, although our country may seem to resemble the civilizations these authors have imagined, we are not one in the same; the difference being that, whether or not the people agree with it, a perfect, loving, and omnipotent God is in ultimate control. And while this idea in itself may seem totalitarian, we know from Scripture that the Lord watches over us and has a plan for us because He loves us, not, as it is in a dystopian world, because He is greedy for control. A human being who gives all the glory and control to the Lord is actually freer than the one who takes the reins for his own life.

Because of Christ's perfect sacrifice for us on the cross, freedom in Christ means freedom from the curse of sin, freedom from death. Without a loving God, who sent His only Son to die for the sins of the world, we would truly live in a dystopian society, without any hope for the future. But in Jeremiah 29:11, God tells His people, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" We, as human beings, have a sin nature that we cannot overcome without the atonement of Christ. But He has overcome for us. So, while it is true that certain themes from these dystopian fictions have become a reality, we can also rest assured that the Lord is ultimately in control, and because of that, we have no reason to be afraid or anguished.

To restate, the goal of my thesis today is to offer you an outlook on how three themes from the books *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Brave New World* are present and often glorified in modern day American society. My objective in comparing these narratives to our country is to prove to you that the United States of America is in danger of plunging into an era of apathetic wickedness and proud godlessness. Not only can I see these themes present in our society, but I see them being conveyed as righteous and desirable, an outcome that seems to me, to be harmonious with the ambitions of the totalitarian leaders of these three books.

While I was only able to focus on a select few, I do recommend reading these books yourself and doing your own analysis of the authors' intents and the seemingly prophetic nature of the novels. Each author paints their own worldview in their individual, creative light, and it is fascinating to peek into the minds of the generations before us.

Aldous Huxley, author of *Brave New World*, once said, "That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons from history." ("A Case of Voluntary Ignorance," in *Collected Essays* (1959). Huxley, along with Orwell and Bradbury,

wanted their works of fiction to make people think. They wanted readers to imagine a world where the people had no control over themselves and their choices. As time has passed, it seems to me that our society is becoming more and more like these dystopias. Making more and more mistakes that America has already made in the past.

Will we ever learn? It is my hope that someday we will. That someday, Americans will read these dystopian novels and think to themselves that they could never imagine a world or a society that existed in that way. But while that hope seems slightly farfetched, I have an even greater hope in Jesus Christ, whose kingdom consists of freedom, love, and the endless joy of the Lord. Our world is becoming more and more dystopian, but how much more glorious will it be to see the face of the Lord at the end of this life, and to know that we are utterly and truly free in His arms? It is in this hope that we endure the imperfect life ahead of us, that although we may live in a dystopian world, we get to look forward to eternity with the loving, sovereign, perfect Lord. A Lord who will forever reign over His people with goodness, truth, and beauty.

*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

*Romans 15:4*

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