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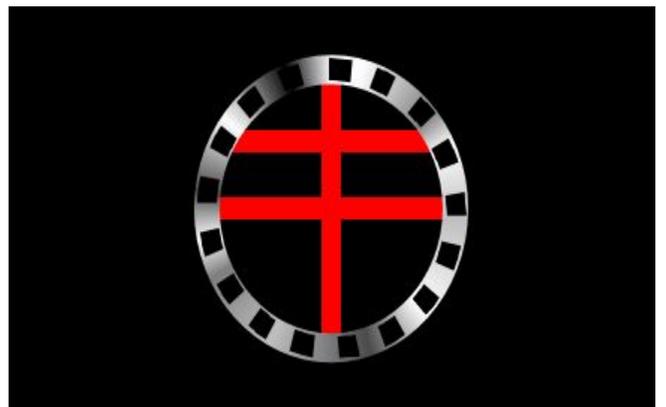
English 114B

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Dystopian Society- A Reality

Often in a dystopian society, people live in a world where they are stripped of their freedom, privacy, and happiness. People envision a “perfect” world full of joy, peace, and equality. Sadly, this “perfect” world is far from reality. The truth is that the horrid vision of a dystopian society is real. The film and the graphic novel *V for Vendetta*; Michel Foucault’s social control theory, “The Panopticon”; and the success of dystopian film and literature all relate to the real world. The sad truth is that the existence of a dystopian society is real in today’s world as it relates to dystopian works of fiction, and one can see these connections through the oppression of people’s freedoms and government surveillance.

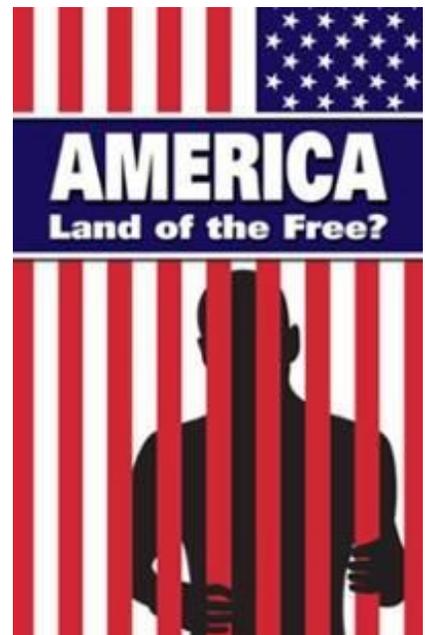
The film and the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* both relate to real life. In both works, High Chancellor Sutler controls society through a totalitarian government known as Norsefire. Norsefire is very oppressive by forcing strict laws, religion, and violence on the people. In the film, Lewis Prothero, the government radio broadcaster, gives a speech regarding the government’s slogan, “Strength Through Unity, Unity Through Faith.” The government’s slogan is a lie because the society does not live in unison and faith, but in isolation and fear of the government.



The cross in the middle of the Norsefire's symbol represents the potency of Christianity. The government strives to have a perfect and Christian society by sending homosexuals, non-Christians, and non-whites to concentration camps to be burned or experimented on.



America's proverbs regarding freedom are misleading even though they are a huge part of our culture. The song lyrics of "America's Star-Spangled Banner" relate to *V for Vendetta's* government slogan. "The Star Spangled Banner" has lyrics that read, lyrics read, "O'er the land of the free" (Key). Due to the many opportunities in this country we are given many freedoms,



although we are not as free as we think. The government controls our privacy without our consent. The song lyrics are true for many reasons, but also proves to be false because of many opportunities that the government takes away from us. According to Michael Balsamo of ABC News, we are being watched by billboards, and recorded through cell phones and messages (“Spying Billboards”). This fact also brings connections to *V for Vendetta* because the civilians do not live under the government’s slogan “Strength Through Unity, Unity Through Faith.”

An excellent example of a totalitarian government that exists today is the Islamic State, or commonly known as ISIS. This government expresses its oppressive and disciplinary power



by brutally abusing the people. In Azadeh Moavenni’s article “ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish, and Escape,” he describes the extreme aggressiveness of the Islamic rule. In Moavenni’s article he points out, “A

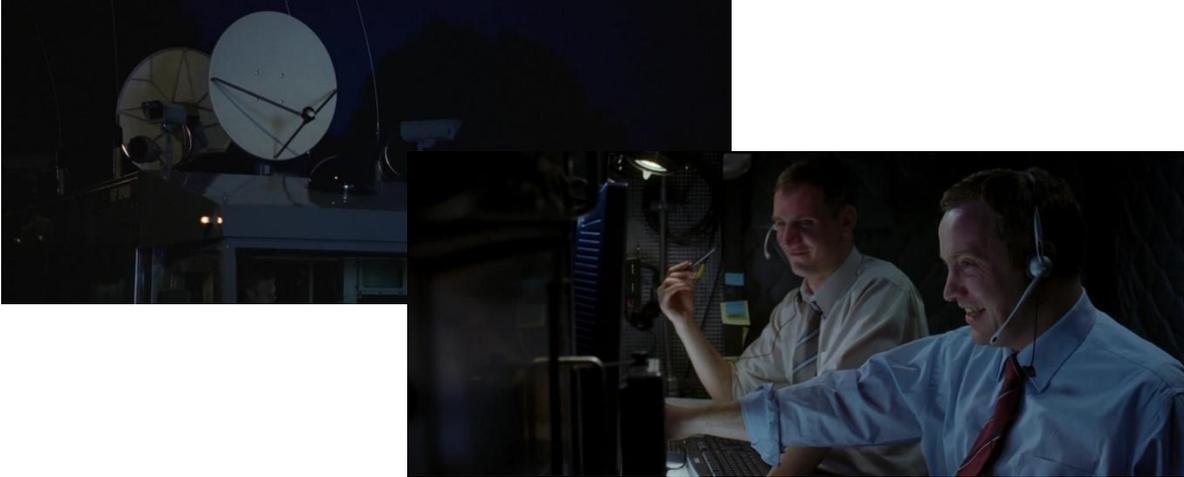
way to keep life tolerable: marrying fighters to assuage the Organization and keep their families in favor; joining the Khansaa Brigade to win some freedom of movement and an income” (Moavenni 6). Three Syrian women Dua, Aws, and Asma are forced to join the rebellious and radical organization. Resisting their allegiance to this group will result in their deaths as well as their families. Moavenni describes the brutality of ISIS by writing, “When they removed their face-concealing niqabs, her friends were also found to be wearing makeup. It was 20 lashes for the abaya offense, five for the makeup, and another five for not being meek enough when

detained” (Moaveni 2). These women are ruthlessly punished for disobeying their religious laws. ISIS seeks to force the religion of Islam onto the people in Syria, whether it be through whipping civilians or beheading them. This story of the Islamic State relates to the government in *V for Vendetta* because both governments are oppressive and control the people through brutal force.

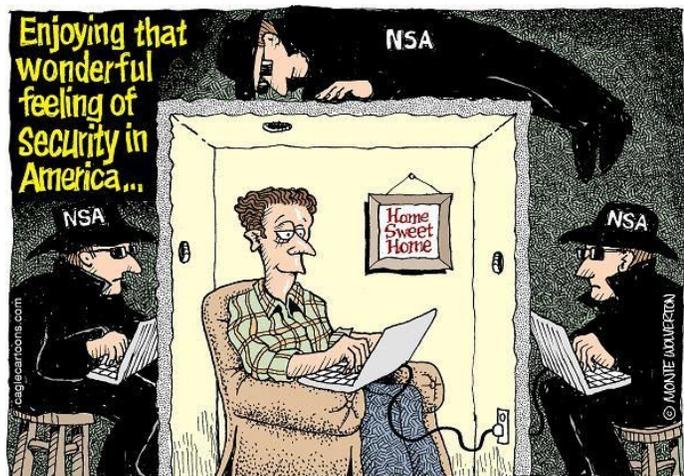


In both works of *V for Vendetta*, mass surveillance is similar to a totalitarian government in that they control everyone and everything, including people’s privacy. The government sets up cameras all over the streets to observe the people. They strike fear in civilians so that everyone will obey the laws. The government justifies this action by claiming that it is a way to protect the people. In the film, V breaks into Bishop Lilliman’s room, confronts him, and takes hold of him. The bishop begs V for mercy after forcing Evey into sex. Bishop Lilliman cries out with fear and tears in his eyes, but V does not show any sympathy for him and kills him. In spite of all of these events occurring, Conrad Heyer and his agents, “The Eye,” eavesdrop on the terrifying conversation and send help. An example of how the government invades people’s privacy is through the government agents. The government agents patrol the streets in their vans while listening to and recording the people’s conversations. They arrest anyone who criticizes the

government and take them away to be executed. The civilians have no freedom or privacy because they are being watched and heard everywhere.



This mass surveillance in the film and graphic novel relates to the world we live in today. Whether people know it or not, the U.S. government is surveying people everywhere, from observing them through cameras to recording their phone calls and messages. According to New York Sen. Charles Schumer from *CBS News*, “Your every move could be tracked, recorded, and stored” (“Spying Billboards”). This is similar to the government in *V for Vendetta* because both governments invade people’s privacy. Schumer is against *Clear Channel Outdoors Americas’s* RADAR program, which uses its billboards for observation. Schumer continues on arguing, “A person’s cellphone should not become a James-Bond personal tracking device for a corporation to gather information about consumers without their consent” (Balsamo). It is a big concern that the government is able to spy on anyone, and they can record messages and conversations without people’s consent. In both works of *V for Vendetta*, the



surveillance of the government is visible; there are cameras everywhere and even security vans patrolling the streets. In reality, the surveillance of the government is invisible, meaning that there are hidden cameras everywhere and agents are secretly observing and recording everyone. The government tries to appease people by saying that this is an act of protection to give them a sense of security, but it is exactly the opposite.

There are many literary works that portray mass surveillance and its negative effect on society. The horrid reality that there is mass surveillance in the world also appears in Michel Foucault's social control theory – the Panopticon. In the Panopticon, the prisoners are isolated from each other in individual cells. A watchtower is center in the middle of the cells where the guards can observe them, but the prisoners cannot see them. Foucault describes what the prisoner thinks by explaining, “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power...he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (citation). Since the prisoners know that they are being watched but do not know if it is all the time, they regulate their own behaviors. This is similar to *V for Vendetta* because it brings connections to the reality in which the civilians are always being watched by the government. In both worlds, people also regulate themselves and obey the laws because they do not know if they are always being observed.



The success of dystopian film and literature connects to the real world in many ways. According to Kirk Baird's article "We hunger for dystopian sci-fi," he and Matt Donahue, a culture instructor at Bowling Green State University, explain some reason for the desire for dystopian works. Donahue explains, "It's a way for the public to perhaps see their everyday world and make them feel good after seeing how screwed up things are in the future" (Baird 2). People are aware that the world is very corrupt, but what they see on the screen cannot compare to their present situations. They take comfort in the fact that things cannot get any worse than what they see on the screen.

The dystopian society appears in today's world and many works of literature such as *V for Vendetta* and Michel Foucault's social control theory –The Panopticon can justify its existence. Many connections can be made from these works such as oppressive governments, fallacious sayings, and mass surveillance. The violent Islamic State, the deceptive lyrics from "The Star Spangled Banner," and the disturbing knowledge of government surveillances are just a few examples of how this world is similar to a dystopian society. Due to all of these distressing events, society takes comfort in many fictional dystopian works because they know that things cannot get any worse than what they read in a book or see in a screen.

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