Why George Orwell’s 1984 is more relevant today than ever before

Based on the original novel by George Orwell, “1984” tells the story of a society suppressed by a governing organization known as Big Brother which infiltrates every aspect of people’s lives — monitoring and controlling what its citizens read, speak, say and do.

This November, Cal State East Bay’s Theatre and Dance Department will perform its adaptation of 1984 — hoping to show audiences the story’s relevance to what is happening right now in society.

“Our democracy has never been under such a threat of vanishing since the Civil War,” said Marc Jacobs, director of 1984. “As a character in the play says, ‘People need to wake up!’ We are seeing our freedoms being stripped away every day by this administration. Just as in ‘1984’ we are a divided country with one half scapegoating minorities as the root of all evil, and a President who tells us not to trust the free press. He has destroyed our ability to think we - as Americans - are ONE people.”

Jacob’s production doesn’t change much from the basic ideas set forth in the original book, published in 1949 — except that it is set in a future America of 2040. Jacobs has incorporated video of what is happening in the world today, which he says frighteningly mirrors Orwell’s dystopian society of “1984.”

Social media has become the people’s addiction. Big Brother sees all and devices are watching us. This new society is built on fear and scapegoating of anyone who can be considered “other.”

“I want people to be surprised by the production,” said Jacobs, who is also a CSUEB professor of theatre and dance. “I open the show showing everyone engrossed on their cell phones, not being aware of each other or even the world around them. Orwell has a line in the book: ‘The people will never revolt because they will not look away from their screens long enough to see what’s going on.’ Well, that’s our world right now, isn’t it?

I’ve also made the illegal love affair at the center of the story a relationship between two women. This is a play about how we treat each other, who we allow to be our rulers, what lies we are willing to swallow from social networking and all of the freedoms we could lose in the stroke of a pen, including the freedom to love who we want and the freedom to live without fear.”

1984 will be performed Nov. 8-17 on Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and on Sunday at 2 p.m. in the university theatre on Cal State East Bay’s Hayward campus. For tickets, visit www.csueastbaytickets.com.
Ticket prices:
General $20
Discount $15
(Discount tickets are for CSUEB Staff and Faculty, seniors 60+, faculty, staff and students at local schools, veterans, military and youth)
CSUEB students $10

DUE TO GRAPHIC VIOLENCE, THIS PLAY IS RATED NC-17. THOSE 17 AND UNDER MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A PARENT. PARENTAL DISCRETION IS ADVISED.

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