AOW#1

America the Dystopia?

Big government and big media are dominating American society and suffocating free speech. Who will rise up?

Our world looks and feels increasingly like the chapters that might immediately precede a work of futuristic, dystopian fiction. And I'm not just talking about the jaw-dropping nature of our presidential election. Consider the growth of global jihadism, the specter of environmental Armageddon/global warming or the continuance of worldwide economic dysfunction – there are many, many more signs that capital-H-historic cultural and political changes are not just happening, they are gaining momentum. The cultural tectonic plates of the U.S., and the world, are moving as we speak (or sputter!).

So I wonder: Are we living through a prequel? And can what comes next possibly be good, a prelude to a golden age, or should I be stockpiling ammunition, booze and silver?

Think about it: Most dystopian novels or movies begin with the protagonist and their people living in some kind of totalitarian regime where a past social collapse or revolution resulted in the ruling class living in a glittering, safe city and the rest of us living in oppressed poverty.

In these worlds (if you haven't read Orwell's "1984," Huxley's "Brave New World" or seen Fritz Lang's 1927 masterpiece "Metropolis," then picture recent movies like "The Hunger Games" or "Divergent"), there is no state or local government. There are no legislative bodies. There is just a national or even global government, run by a charismatic leader who relies on martial law and control of natural resources to keep things orderly when unpopular decisions are made.

In the worlds of dystopian science fiction, there are no small businesses, just corporations that are run by, or in conjunction with, the Big Government. Technology is so advanced, it is almost magical. Information comes from centralized sources. And the oppressed thirst and fight for basic rights, such as freedom of speech, expression and association.

Today, right now, the U.S. government's branches are broken. We still have a legislature, but extreme partisanship and a charismatic, doctrinaire president have rendered it paralyzed. A court of elites break the big stalemates (at least until they themselves became a stalemate), and the rebels (limited government conservatives) beg them to keep the executive branch in check.

Information sources have become increasingly centralized and nationalized thanks to cable television and the Internet. Facebook has the centralized, massive, unprecedented power to influence the information we consume, almost blithely, on a daily basis. We learned this week that it can nudge the political direction of the country by limiting access to information if the wrong people are tending the algorithms.

Meanwhile, small, local news outlets are withering away and closing their doors. They belong on an endangered species list next to small businesses and small community banks.

Business dynamism – a longstanding strength of the diversified American economy that means, simply, more businesses open each year than close – has suffocated next to excessive regulation, high taxes, cronyism and too-big-to-fail policies and beliefs.

Political correctness has expanded into a genuine threat to free speech. The people feel so muzzled by the standard of fussy, careful, nonoffensive language that they are drawn to a presidential candidate whom they find refreshing in his monosyllabic, borderline profane rhetorical style.

Every kind of diversity imaginable is now embraced or even enforced with the one exception of diversity of thought.

And isn't thought what really makes us human?

Are you getting freaked out yet?

Are you thinking about sharing this column on Twitter or Facebook, then reconsidering because you don't want a permanent record of your radical, rebellious views?

I hope we aren't living in a dystopian prequel. But the evidence indicates we may be heading in that direction. The question is whether our course can be changed.

In the fictionalized version of this story, a new generation rises up. Katniss volunteers as Tribute and shoots an arrow into the dome.

I've asked a lot of questions in this piece, so I'll end with a few more: What generation of Americans will turn us back toward freedom, dynamism and diversity of thought? Are the millennials up for the challenge? Or is their culture of coddling the very living evidence of how far society has fallen?