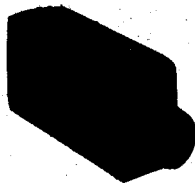


[Hard Times]

Classroom Surveillance by Kodak

(12 years ahead of its time)



BARTOW, FLORIDA. Just a few miles from the spires of Disney World's Tomorrowland is an Orwellian future that didn't wait until 1984. In Polk County, Florida, a flat, sleepy stretch of land, world renowned for frozen orange juice, the school board has begun installing a series of special cameras which will monitor junior and senior high school students during class, in the halls and while eating lunch.

The School Board of Polk County, plagued with the typical problems of drug dealing, student unrest and vandalism, became the first system in the nation to install Kodak Analyst super 8 security cameras. The police, banks and retail shops have been using similar cameras for over a year.

W. W. Reed, superintendent of the Polk County School Board, said that the surveillance equipment, although in use only a short time, has had a psychological impact on the 10 senior and 16 junior high schools where they are in use. "They have had a definite effect on the total tenor at the schools," said Reed.

The cameras, "the latest super 8 advance" according to a Kodak company release, cost around \$240 apiece and are set to snap a picture every 30 seconds. Because they are encased in a sound-absorbent box, students never know when a picture is being taken. The time-lapse camera can operate for days without changing film.

Polk County officials have set up the Analyst super 8s in corridors, around the school grounds, problem classrooms and cafeterias. The cameras are fitted into specially constructed wall brackets and come equipped with

a variety of lenses depending on the angle and depth of the subjects being photographed. Principals have also been supplied with hand-held models to cover incidents in areas not monitored by the wall-mounted Analysts. Reed takes great pains to emphasize that the school board has no intention of snooping on the students. "We're neither interested, nor do we have the time to 'spy' on our students when they are conducting themselves in manners normal for their age level," he said.

"We process and look at film only when incidents have occurred that require establishing responsibility for them," Reed continued. "It is a completely innocent way of taking remedial action."

But students at Polk County Schools and the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida disagree with the superintendent as to the innocence of the Analyst super 8s. "We are inhibited from being ourselves," said a senior student body president from one school where the cameras have been used. "It doesn't say much for our teachers when they need spy cameras to keep control," he added.

Florence Wills, spokeswoman for the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, said that the Polk County School Board's installation of the cameras constituted "a definite invasion of privacy." The ACLU, said Mrs. Wills, is "actively searching for a plaintiff in a right-to-privacy case in Polk County involving the School Board."

"We feel the Polk County School Board has attempted to rewrite the Constitution of the United States," she continued. "We feel this type of surveillance should be stopped before it spreads to other school boards around the country. We already have information that the Palm Beach County [Florida] Board is about to install a similar system by Kodak."

In the meantime, the giant Rochester photographic firm is mounting a major effort to put its Analyst super 8 cameras in every school, retail store, government office and warehouse in the country. "The present crime emergency may be more important than almost any other environmental problem," states the narrator of Kodak's sales presentation for their security cameras.

Kodak proudly trumpets Spokane, Washington's Sheriff William J. Reilly's claim that one Analyst time-lapse camera smashed a drug ring working a local high school.

"We got a call from a lady reporting that a pusher was habitually working at a street corner near the high school," Sheriff Reilly said. The sheriff set up an Analyst camera in a parked vehicle at the corner with the lens poking through the curtain. "The suspect didn't show up," the sheriff said, "but one day he will and we will have him."

Testimonies such as Sheriff Reilly's, Kodak says, has school boards seeing the Analyst camera as a panacea for every type of discipline problem and a protector of individual rights, not a violator of them.

"The students have been told the cameras are there and that it is possible for us to positively identify not only those responsible for trouble, but also those who are innocent of wrongdoing," said Superintendent Reed. "Thus, the innocent are protected."

Yet pupils have complained just the opposite is the case. "In any type of trouble, everybody that the camera photographs," said one senior high student, "is sent to the office. After all, they can't tell who caused the trouble because they don't have sound cameras. They don't know who said what to whom and, anyway, the instigation of trouble might just happen to fall during the 30 seconds the camera isn't photographing."

And students loudly proclaim that school rules are as widely ignored as they were before the installation of the cameras. Illicit activity has just moved out of the range of the super 8 lens, they say.

What little drug dealing went on before the introduction of the Analyst in this small Central Florida county still goes on, mostly in the bathrooms "because they haven't set up cameras there yet." Contact between opposite sexes (which can even include holding hands) is a strict violation of school rules and harder to arrange. Underground newspapers, such as *Rolling Stone*, are taboo and easily spotted by the cameras. "Nothing has changed but the amount of subterfuge and fear," said a student. "It's like being in jail for six hours a day." ■

by Buddy Nevins