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Title: 1984 by George Orwell

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Introduction

Imagine a world where every thought is monitored, every movement is tracked, and every word you speak could be your undoing. In George Orwell's 1984, this world isn't just a nightmare—it's reality. The air is thick with fear as Big Brother watches over all, a faceless symbol of an all-powerful regime that demands absolute loyalty and control. History is rewritten daily, truth bends to the will of the Party, and individuality is crushed beneath the weight of conformity. In this chilling dystopia, Winston Smith, a seemingly insignificant man, dares to question the world around him. As he secretly yearns for freedom in a society where even thinking differently is a crime, 1984 unravels a gripping tale of rebellion, love, and the fragile nature of truth. Orwell's haunting vision of a future dominated by oppressive surveillance and thought control forces us to confront our own world, leaving us with one lingering question: How far would you go to protect your mind?

Historical and Cultural context

Totalitarianism and Dictatorships

1984 was written in the late 1940s, shaped by the political climate of that era, especially the rise of totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under Stalin. Orwell was deeply influenced by the widespread use of propaganda, state surveillance, and political repression in these dictatorships, which are reflected in the novel's oppressive government, the Party. In the Soviet Union, Stalin's cult of personality, the use of secret police, purges, show trials, and forced labor camps served as direct inspiration for 1984's Big Brother, the Thought Police, and the concept of “thought crime”. Orwell's experience fighting in the Spanish Civil War, where he saw firsthand the manipulation of truth by both fascist and communist forces, also shaped his fears of political authoritarianism.

World War II and its aftermath

The novel was written shortly after World War II (1939–1945), a period when much of Europe lay in ruins and the world was adjusting to the new political realities of the Cold War. Orwell was particularly alarmed by how propaganda had been used during the war, both by the Axis and the Allies, and how governments had expanded their power during times of crisis. In post-war Europe, Orwell saw the emergence of two global superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—each with its own ideological stance. The rivalry between these powers formed the seeds of the Cold War, where Orwell feared the world

would divide into totalitarian blocs, as represented by the superstates Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia in 1984.

Propaganda and Media

Orwell was particularly concerned with how governments could manipulate information and control reality itself through propaganda. This was evident in the Soviet practice of altering historical records to fit the current political narrative, which directly inspired the Ministry of Truth in 1984. In the novel, the Party constantly rewrites history, erasing people from existence, altering facts, and presenting contradictory versions of reality, forcing people into a mindset of doublethink (believing two contradictory ideas simultaneously). The control of language, through Newspeak, was a reflection of how Orwell saw political language becoming corrupt. He was concerned with how euphemistic language was used to sanitize horrors like war and oppression—something he detailed in his essay "Politics and the English Language" (1946). In 1984, Newspeak is designed to reduce the range of thought, effectively preventing rebellion by making dissenting thoughts impossible to articulate.

British Politics and Society

While 1984 is set in a fictional totalitarian state, Orwell was also influenced by the politics of postwar Britain. The country was transitioning to a welfare state under the Labour government, which implemented social programs like nationalized healthcare and industries. Orwell was supportive of democratic socialism,

but he also feared the potential dangers of state overreach. Moreover, during the war, rationing, blackouts, and other government controls had become part of everyday life, and Orwell saw how a war footing could lead to a permanent state of emergency where individual freedoms were sacrificed for the supposed greater good. This is mirrored in the perpetual war in 1984, where Oceania is always at war with either Eurasia or Eastasia to maintain internal control and justify the Party's oppression.

Cultural Anxiety about technology

Orwell's 1984 also reflects cultural anxieties about the increasing power of technology. The novel's omnipresent telescreens symbolize the use of technology for surveillance and control, prefiguring the modern debates over privacy, surveillance, and state power in a digital world. Orwell was particularly wary of how technology could be used to monitor and control human behavior, a concern that feels prophetic in the age of mass surveillance and data collection.

Orwell's personal experiences

Orwell's personal background also played a role in shaping the novel. Born Eric Arthur Blair, he spent time as a colonial officer in British India and later lived in poverty in Paris and London, experiences that gave him a firsthand understanding of power dynamics, social inequality, and oppression. His involvement in the Spanish Civil War, where he fought with socialist forces and witnessed the brutal infighting between different factions, left him disillusioned with authoritarianism on both the right and left.