

Becoming Conscious

Nineteen-eighty-four by George Orwell has been reprinted countless times, and each version has a new, ominous cover to display. My well-thumbed copy is blank save for a bright blue iris and a pupil on an expanse of whiteness. It's not much, but every time I make eye contact with *Nineteen-eighty-four*, I see something different. Sometimes the picture evokes terror, other times revelation, and occasionally loneliness. I have felt all of these while reading and stepping into the shoes of the story's plucky protagonist, Winston Smith. In his diary, our hero writes, "Until they have become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled, they can never become conscious." (Orwell; p 70). I know this is true, but I also can see that, after reading Orwell's book I have, in a way, become conscious. *Nineteen-eighty-four* opened my eyes. This incredible book has made me aware of the world, got me invested in politics, and caused me to think critically about the past, present, and future.

Despite its historical-sounding name, *Nineteen-eighty-four* is not about one year, it tells of a possible eventuality that must be avoided. Even in 1948, when Orwell wrote his masterpiece, humanity was on a dark trajectory. We are still on that path today. *Nineteen-eighty-four* haunts me everywhere I look. For example, a text message that reads "g2g, catch u l8r" foretells of the rise of Newspeak, the crude language that oppresses its speakers and listeners. This may seem a little crazy, but aside from small occurrences we have resigned to accept as normal, Orwellian themes play out on a larger scale. Often, people do not even notice. Ever since the terrorist attack on September 11th, the United States government has become more paranoid than ever. Congress passed the PATRIOT act, which currently allows the government to spy on American citizens with little regulation. Circumstances in America may soon come to match Orwell's fictional country of Oceania, in which "There was of course no way of knowing if you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched

everybody all the time.” (Orwell; p 3). Even if you did not know you are constantly being watched by the thought police everywhere from schools to shopping malls, you could read *Nineteen-eighty-four* and see that there are other major flaws with society as it stands in the United States today. Besides our gradual descent into Newspeak, another deep-seated problem is the alienation of those who are different. The Spies, members of a cruel scouting organization who lurk among the pages of this book, appalled me. But really we should be disgusted by the truth they signify: children target those who are weak and set them up for a life of misery. Not just the children of this sick alternate universe shun those who are different. Everyone participates in this slaughter of diversity, this building of a wall against foreign ideas. And, slowly, we do too. I often keep my dissenting opinions quiet, for fear of being viewed as somewhat like a thoughtcriminal (Newspeak word for an individual thinker), even among my family.

In fact, I crimethink often. I’m a socialist in a capitalist country. It’s hard, but it’s what I’ve chosen. I had no choice, really, after reading the work of George Orwell. *Nineteen-eighty-four* shook my world and expanded my literary horizons. Reading this reaffirmed my ideology, even though the evil ruling political agency in *Nineteen-eighty-four* is called English Socialism, or (in Newspeak) Ingsoc. Actually, Ingsoc is to socialism as war is to peace. “Thus the Party rejects and vilifies every principle for which the Socialist movement originally stood, and it chooses to do this in the name of Socialism.” (Orwell, p 216). This complete opposite of my beliefs presented here repelled me, and pushed me further in what I think is the right direction. I became even more aware of politics, discovering the Orwellian brand of socialism, and keeping abreast of current events. Flick on the news and see interminable wars, power struggles, totalitarian governments, and exploitation of whole populations are wreaking havoc across the globe as I write this. But in America, we’re told these things and expected to immediately forget, because, after all, ignorance is strength. After hearing Orwell shout these things in my ear so I could transcend my bubble of life, I can’t ignore it. I have to make a difference, even if it is just a small mark on the page of history.

In short, *Nineteen-eighty-four* has made me the person I am today. It exposed the faults of human society, and stressed the importance of political ideas (and gave me some ideas of my own), all while providing an intense story of a deranged world. I'll never forget this book and I don't want to. It is a must-read for anyone who is not afraid to be a thoughtcriminal.

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