
Government Surveillance in George Orwell's 1984: Bogus Security

In George Orwell's novel 1984 Big Brother controls the population of Oceania through many ways. One of these ways is surveillance; monitoring everyone's every move. This instills fear in the people in their everyday lives to carry out their moves and actions a certain way. In our society today the surveillance described in 1984 is not as harsh and extensive but it does exist. In a way, we also monitor ourselves socially, making sure not to behave in a way that portrays us in a way we don't want. Big Brother's practices in 1984 are not completely similar to our government today, but you can find some small underlying similarities in the foundations of our lives.

In 1984, surveillance is a key part of how Big Brother has a grip on the lives of the people in Oceania. The citizens are constantly under the watch of the government. They monitor them in their houses, at their jobs, in the bathrooms; anywhere they go, they are being watched. Big Brother does this to make sure that the people are not doing anything to go against the rules of the government. This fear of constantly being watched and knowing that if they act out they will be punished, forces the citizens of Oceania to live their lives linear to the rules set in place by the government.

There are different types of surveillance used by the government. Telescreens are the main form of surveillance in Oceania. These screens see and hear everything and are placed in homes, jobs, public areas, and other places; "Any sound Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it," (Orwell 4). There are also small microphones hidden in parts of the country in trees or other places. If it isn't enough to monitor people's every move and every word, there are also Thought Police, that try to monitor people they assume to be thinking ill of the government and Big Brother. Through monitoring the telescreens, they accuse people who act a certain way of being against Big Brother. They also use children as spies to listen to what their parents say and tell on them to the Thought Police if they speak in any ill manner against Big Brother or the government:

The Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug into your wire whenever they wanted to (Orwell 5).

The government also monitors you at public events, such as the Two Minutes Hate. If you don't attend such gatherings or show enough enthusiasm you are suspicious to the government of

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thoughtcrime. Thoughtcrime is thinking in ways you should not be, “Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime is death” (Orwell 30).

In our society we are not as heavily monitored as the people of Oceania are, but there are many ways that our government monitors what we do. Due to advancements in technology, we have the internet, computers, smartphones, and gps among more technologies. Our social media accounts, internet history, call and text logs, and location using gps can very easily be accessed by the government. At any time the government can know who you’re talking to and what you’re talking about and also know your exact location. Many people have a sense of security and privacy, but there are many way that the government has ways to know what you are doing.

In 2013, a scandal broke out about the NSA, the National Security Agency. It was reported that they allegedly collected the phone records of millions of Americans. According to an article on BBC, the NSA tapped directly into the servers of Facebook, Google, Yahoo, and other internet companies in order to monitor people’s accounts and track their online communication. Former CIA agent, Edward Snowden, leaked this information to warn the people about these invasions of privacy. With advancements in communication it is also easier for the government to monitor our communication. The government tries to justify the monitoring of our communication with laws like the Patriot Act, that gives the government access to phone logs in order to prevent acts of terrorism. This access to our communication is misused, as seen in the NSA Scandal.

Although our government does not take surveillance to an extreme like Big Brother does in George Orwell’s novel 1984, there are some notable similarities. In Oceania, the government uses telescreens and microphones to monitor every citizen’s moves and words. While our government uses a major technology, the internet, which we use for entertainment, to monitor our conversations. We have a false sense of security and privacy in our lives. Our homes are not monitored like the citizens of Oceania, but it is just as bad that the government can access our phone calls, texts, and social media accounts at any time they wish.

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