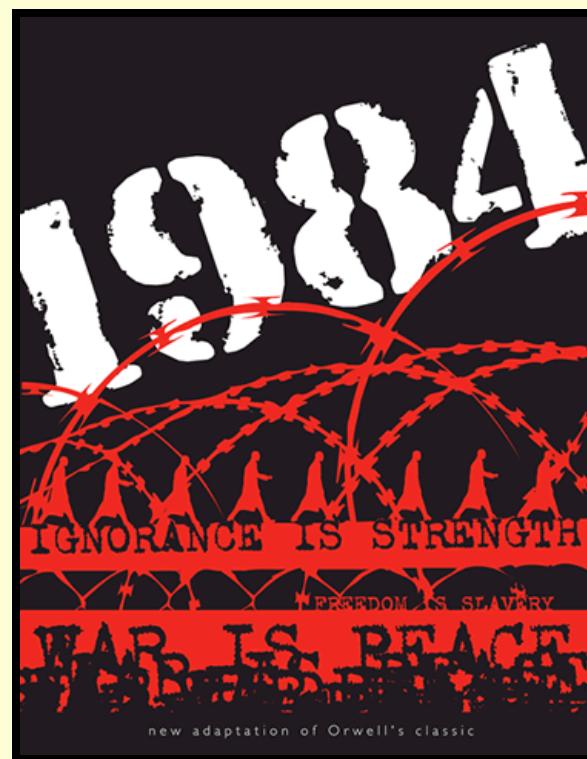


***Nineteen Eighty-Four* (sometimes 1984) is a darkly satirical political novel by George Orwell. The story takes place in a nightmarish dystopia, in which an ever-surveillant State enforces perfect conformity among citizens through indoctrination, fear, lies and ruthless punishment.**

**It was first published on June 8, 1949, is Orwell's most famous work, and is the inspiration of the word "Orwellian."**

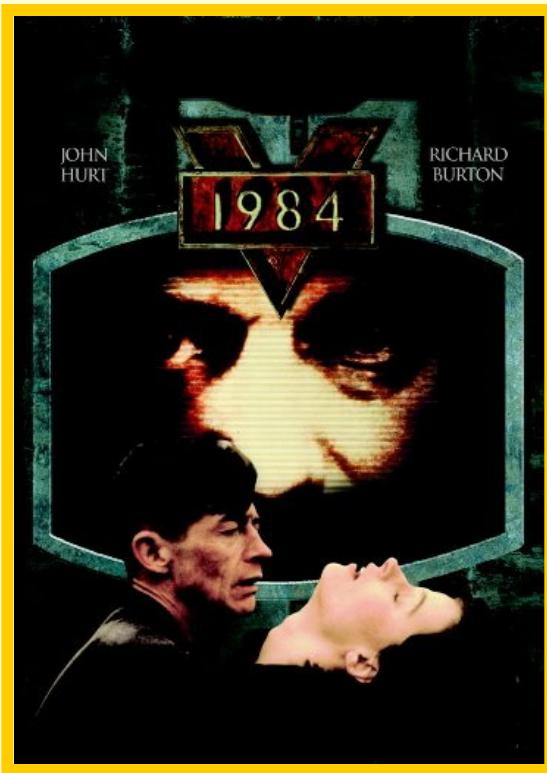


The novel introduced the concepts of the ever-present, all-seeing Big Brother, the notorious Room 101, the thought police who use telescreens (televisions that contain a surveillance camera – found in almost every room of the apartments of the characters in the novel), and the fictional language Newspeak.

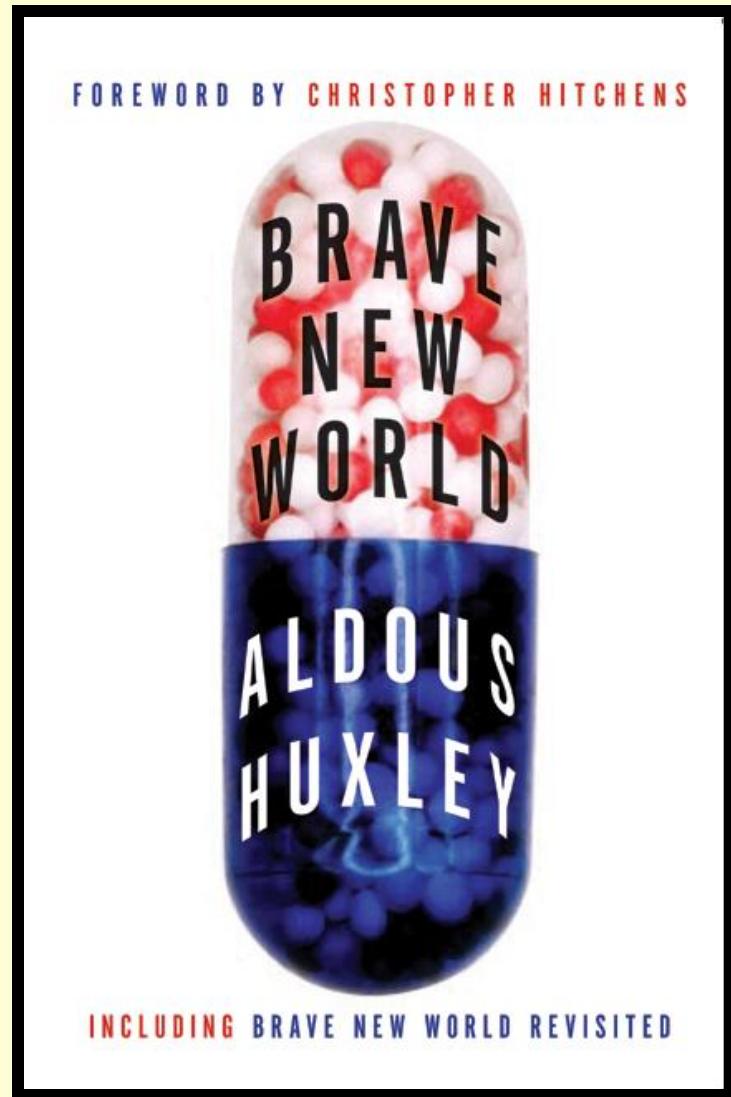


Orwell had originally chosen the year 1980 for his work. But as the writing dragged on due to the progression of his pulmonary Tuberculosis, Orwell changed it to 1982 and then to 1984.

There are various ideas as to the meaning of the title. It is widely thought that Orwell simply switched the last two digits of the year in which he wrote it (1948).



Along with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the world of *1984* is one of the first and most cited characterizations of a realistic dystopia to have appeared in English literature. It has been translated into many languages.





# The World of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*



The world described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has striking and deliberate parallels to the Stalinist Soviet Union; notably, the themes of a betrayed revolution, which Orwell put so famously in

*Animal Farm*, the subordination of individuals to "the Party," and the extensive and institutional use of propaganda, especially as it influenced the main character of the book, Winston Smith.



# The Ministries of Oceania

Oceania's four ministries are housed in huge pyramidal structures displaying the three slogans of the party on their sides.

## The Ministry of Peace

Minipax is the newspeak name for the Ministry of Peace, which concerns itself with making war

## The Ministry of Plenty

Miniplenty in Newspeak, it is the ministry involved in maintaining ubiquitous poverty in Oceania

## The Ministry of Truth

Minitrue is the propaganda arm of the Ingsoc State. They distribute the leaflets, porno, and of course the telescreens. Winston Smith spends his daytime hours “correcting” historical records in Minitrue.

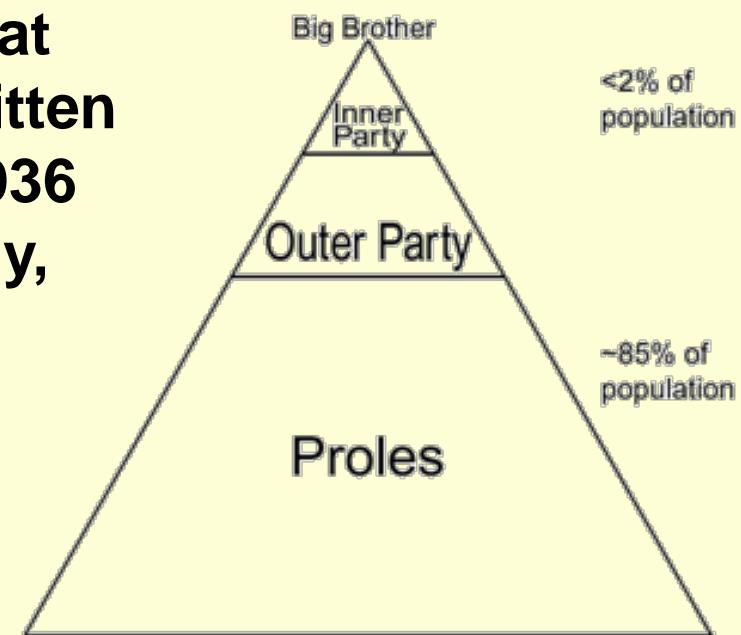
## The Ministry of Love

Miniluv is a gigantic windowless building devoted to torture and brutality. The home of the thought police, it is surrounded by a maze of barbed wire and machinegun towers.



# Orwell's Inspiration

To understand why Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one has only to look at his less famous writings: most significantly, *Homage to Catalonia* does a lot to explain his distrust of totalitarianism and the betrayal of revolutions; *Coming Up For Air*, at points, celebrates the individual freedom that is lost in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; and his essay “*Why I Write*” explains clearly that all the “serious work” he had written since the Spanish Civil War in 1936 was “written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism.”





However, the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* also reflects various aspects of the social and political life of both the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Orwell is also reported to have said that the book described what he saw as the actual situation in the United Kingdom, where he lived, in 1948, where rationing was still in place, and the British Empire was dissolving at the same time as newspapers were reporting its triumphs.

At the time Orwell had also been working for the overseas service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which may help to explain one of his interpretations of four key ministries that governed the world of *Big Brother*.





# Parody of the 1941 "Four Freedoms"

**The structure of the government resembled a parody in reverse of the famous 1941 USA State of the Union speech by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In that speech before the assembled Congress, the president outlined Four Freedoms:**

*The FOUR FREEDOMS*

MESSAGE TO THE 77<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS • • JANUARY 6, 1941

*The first*

*The second*

*The third*

*The fourth*

IN the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

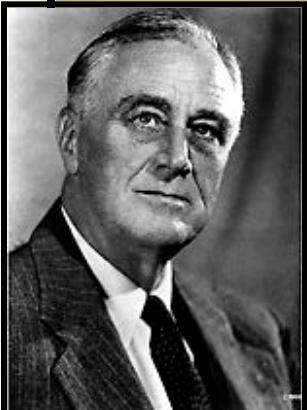
is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world.

is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world.

is freedom from want—which translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world.

is freedom from fear—which translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere.

*Franklin D. Roosevelt*

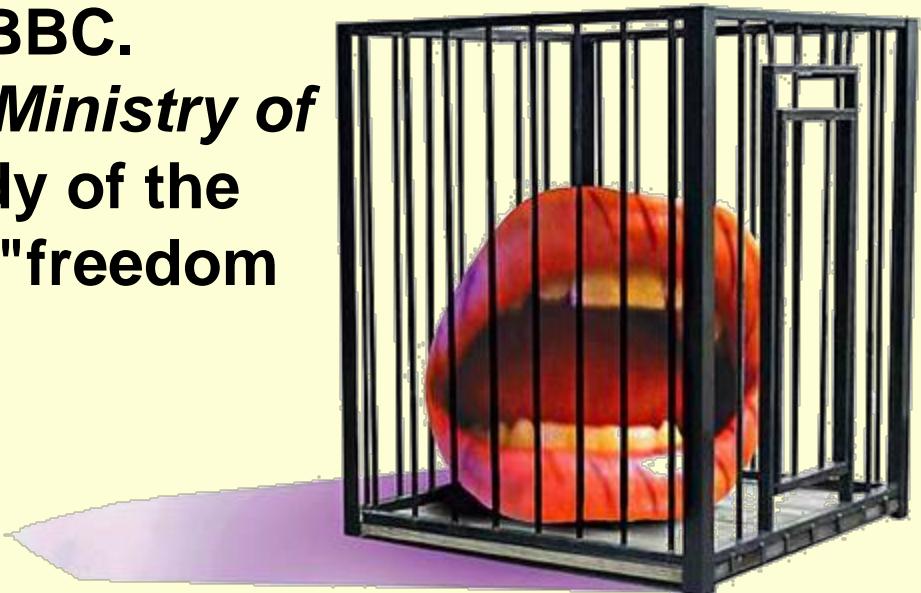


*"The first is freedom of speech and expression – everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way – everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want, which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants – everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear, which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor – anywhere in the world."*

George Orwell appears to have taken this 1941 speech and used it, along with his own experiences at the BBC, to create by reversal, the four key ministries of government in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Each is focused on an object in exquisite irony, utterly antithetical to its name so that the Ministry of Truth is concerned with lies, an idea that Orwell seems to have gained by his work at the BBC.

The Ministry of Truth as a *Ministry of Lies* would also be a parody of the first of the four freedoms: "freedom of speech."





**"The Ministry of Peace** concerns itself with war," wrote Orwell. A few years earlier, Roosevelt had described the fourth of his freedoms as being "freedom from fear." Reality said otherwise and so did Orwell in describing the "Ministry of Peace."

"... **the Ministry of Love**," wrote Orwell, was in reality concerned "with torture." The second of the four freedoms addressed the issue of religion. If "*God is love*" then the "Ministry of Love" could be interpreted as mocking that ideal as well.

Finally, Orwell described the "**Ministry of Plenty**" as dealing in reality "with starvation." The third of Roosevelt's four freedoms addressed the issue of freedom from want. Orwell seems to have heard these words with a sarcastic mindset.



## The Party

In his novel Orwell creates a world in which citizens have no right to a personal life or personal thought. Leisure and other activities are controlled through strict mores. Sexual pleasure is discouraged, with females being taught not to enjoy it; sex is retained only for the purpose of reproduction.

The menacing figure of Big Brother has been variously interpreted to be that of Soviet leader Josef Stalin and BBC design department's Roy Oxley.



The mysterious head of government is the omniscient, omnipotent, beloved Big Brother, or "BB." Big Brother is described as "a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features."

He is usually displayed on posters with the slogan "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU."

His nemesis is the hated Emmanuel Goldstein, a Party member who had been in league with Big Brother and The Party during the revolution. Goldstein is said to be a major part of the Brotherhood, a vast underground anti-Party fellowship.





**BIG BROTHER IS  
WATCHING YOU**

[www.1984comic.com](http://www.1984comic.com)





The three slogans of the Party, visible everywhere, are:

- WAR IS PEACE
- FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
- IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

While by definition these words are antonyms, in the world of 1984 the world is in a state of constant war, no one is free, and everyone is ignorant.

Through the universality of the extremes the terms become meaningless, and the slogans become axiomatic.

They echo the slogan "Arbeit macht frei" ("Work Makes Freedom") on the gates of Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps; the slogans are being passed off as truth by a totalitarian power.

This type of semiconscious lie, and the deliberate self-deception with which the citizens are encouraged to accept it, is called doublethink.



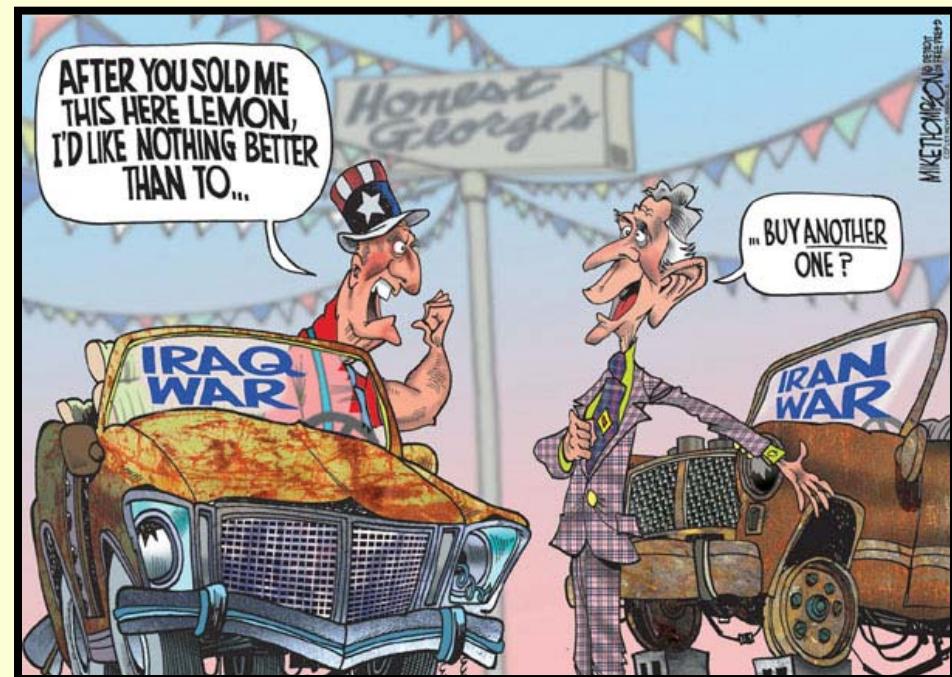


The world is controlled by three functionally similar authoritarian superstates engaged in perpetual war with each other: Oceania (ideology: Ingsoc – English Socialism), Eurasia (ideology: Neo-Bolshevism) and Eastasia (ideology: Death Worship or Obliteration of the Self).

In terms of the political map of the late 1940s when the book was written, *Oceania* covers the areas of the British Empire and Commonwealth, the United States of America and Latin America; *Eastasia* corresponds to China, Japan, Korea, and India, and *Eurasia* corresponds to the Soviet Union and Continental Europe.

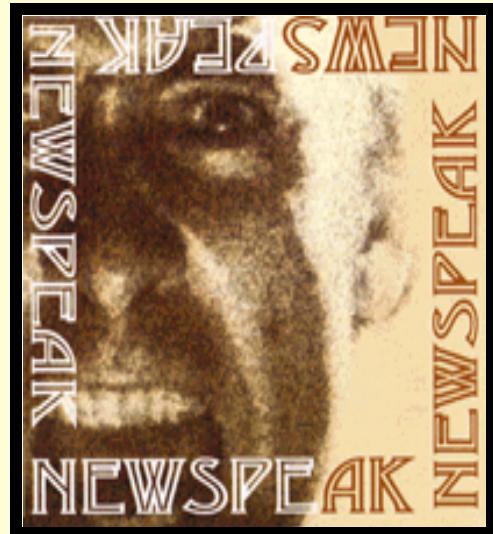
The United Kingdom's placement in Oceania rather than in Eurasia is commented upon in the book as an undisputed historic anomaly.

London, the novel's setting, is the capital of the Oceanian province of Airstrip One, the renamed Britain and Ireland. Goldstein's book explains that the three ideologies are basically the same, but it is imperative to keep the public uninformed about that. The population is led to believe that the other two ideologies are detestable.



# Newspeak

**Newspeak, the "official language" of Oceania, is extraordinary in that its vocabulary decreases every year; the state of Oceania sees no purpose in maintaining a complex language, and so Newspeak is a language dedicated to the "destruction of words." As the character Syme puts it:**





***"Of course the great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well... If you have a word like 'good', what need is there for a word like 'bad'? 'Ungood' will do just as well... Or again, if you want a stronger version of 'good', what sense is there in having a whole string of vague useless words like 'excellent' and 'splendid' and all the rest of them? 'Plusgood' covers the meaning, or 'doubleplusgood' if you want something stronger still.... In the end the whole notion of goodness and badness will be covered by only six words; in reality, only one word."***

**(Part One, Chapter Five)**

The true goal of Newspeak is to take away the ability to adequately conceptualize revolution, or even dissent, by removing words that could be used to that end. Since the thought police had yet to develop a method of reading people's minds to catch dissent, Newspeak was created so that it wasn't even possible to *think* a dissenting thought. This concept has been examined (and widely discounted) in linguistics. (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis)



# Technology

The world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is foremost a political, not a technological, dystopia. (Hence it can be quite inaccurate to refer to it whenever there are concerns about new technologies.) The technological level of the society in the novel is mostly crude and less advanced than in the real 1980s. Apart from the telescreens and speech-recognizing typewriters, it is no more advanced than in wartime Britain. Living standards are low and declining; in that regard, Orwell's vision is diametrically opposed to the technological hedonism of *Brave New World*.



None of the three blocs has much genuine interest in technological progress, since it could destabilize their grip on power.

Nuclear weapons, in particular, are avoided in the perpetual war, since its whole point is to be indecisive. The technologies that are employed are obsolete and perhaps deliberately wasteful, such as huge *floating fortresses*.

This stagnation is related to what is perhaps the most frightening aspect of the novel: for all their brutality, the regimes are not going to burn themselves out in strategically significant conquests or technological arms races. Rather, they have reached a stable equilibrium that could last for ever.



**BIG BRO  
WATCHER**

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