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Individuality in *1984*

A man leaving a long day of work walks along a poorly lit sidewalk to his apartment - it is quiet, pitch-black, and he appears to be alone, but he knows he is being watched. How would it feel to be constantly watched? Ultimately, personal privacy is taken away, people are not be able to have an identity of their own, but most importantly, individualism is unable to flourish.

George Orwell, a genius and an English novelist in the twentieth century, depicts a totalitarian dystopia through his protagonist Winston Smith in his famous novel *1984*. Due to constant surveillance, strict policies and a corrupt totalitarian regime, freedom of thoughts, words, and actions are completely obliterated in Orwell's world. The fictional totalitarian state he creates is a warning to all and it depicts a close resemblance to that of Nazi Germany's society and Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union in the twentieth century. As seen in *1984* by George Orwell, in a government that controls, constantly surveys, and takes away all forms of freedom, an individual is unable to flourish into their own unique being, due to the government's desire for complete conformity.

For there to be conformity in Oceania-Orwell's fictional dystopia, the Inner Party controls every aspect of the people's lives. Laws are a powerful weapon for leaders in *1984*. Orwell creates them to be obsessed with organization, which leads to a limitation of the citizens' freedom. Everything has to be completely compliant in this fictional land, and if there fails to be absolute conformity, persecution and suffering is enforced. The Party monitors the state's

members at every waking moment with the use of hidden microphones and telescreens. Freedom is completely obliterated. In addition to the use of extreme surveillance, physical control is strongly sanctioned. The Party continually watches for signs of unorthodox actions. A strange facial expression, people's reactions, or an insult aimed at the party could all lead to an arrest. Orwell states that, "Winston kept his back turned to the telescreen. It was safer; though, as he knew well, even a back can be revealing" (Orwell 3). All aspects are examined to uncover the citizen's feelings toward Big Brother - Oceania's leader and representation of the party. People struggle to maintain individuality due to Big Brother's ever watching eye. Citizens are unable to express their negativity towards the party due to the states extreme supervision. Along with being physically and technologically controlled, language and information are also restrained if one lives in Orwell's fictional world. Documents, photographs, and personal items from the past are all seized from the people. In chapter two, Winston contemplates how, "not even an anonymous word scribbled on a piece of paper could physically survive" (Orwell 27). Furthermore, the Inner Party established a language to replace English called 'Newspeak'. Its purpose was to eliminate insubordinate thoughts and actions. This language and abolition of information narrows the thoughts and memories of the citizens of Oceania which therefore takes away their individualism. George Orwell, also known as one of the greatest authors in the twentieth century, "created a world where the individual remains attentive to the surface of the earth because his government has defined and emphasized the value of that awareness through its prohibition" (Clune). A scholarly article, written by Michael Clune, accurately shows how a government can define an individual in a dangerous way. Ultimately, different critics point out that a restrained government is quite dangerous. For instance, an author named Peter Stansky wrote a review about *1984* stating that, "Orwell's great strength was as a naysayer, as a defender

of the underdog, the pointer-out of dangers through the corruption of language and - an aspect where this study is particularly strong – the dangers of manipulation and destruction of the past” (Stansky). He proves that Orwell showed the dangers of the corruption of language and how such a fraud can manipulate the past. Orwell creates a world where even the slightest detail –a twitch, a word, a facial expression-can determine one’s life. The Inner Party’s propaganda: control over technology, physicality, language, and information are proven to be upright unhealthy. In Orwell’s world, absolutely nothing is free. Individualism is suppressed to nothingness.

Correspondingly, a totalitarian society denies individuals to shape and express themselves as their own unique being. George Orwell creates a fictional society that accurately depicts a totalitarian culture. To diminish rebellion, Oceania’s individuals learn to please the government by living in the standards of the Inner Party’s set regime. The Party maintained three slogans throughout the novel: “War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength” (Orwell 26). The authorities believe that if there is continuous war, people will give their devotion to the government. Therefore, peace will be maintained. The idea that “freedom is slavery” implies that if the Party lets citizens express their individual ideas, the authorities will lose control. However, if the people slave themselves to the government’s one initial idea, the Party will not be threatened. The Party establishes the idea that “Ignorance is strength.” This statement indirectly claims that being ignorant of information allows one to conform into a society, which therefore increases the power of the Party. Charles W. Eliot, the author of *The Conflict Between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy*, states that, “Individualism values highly not only the rights of the single person, but also the initiative of the individual left free by society” (Eliot). A free society is incredibly important for individualism to flourish. Ultimately, if one

changes a society like the Inner Party does, the individual will be altered as well. With an excessively controlled government, a society becomes stagnant. People will want to rebel due to the strict commands of their leaders. As seen in *1984*, to deprive individuals of their beliefs, implausible threats of harsh punishment is thrown upon the citizens. Prisons are necessary for dangerous, obstinate problems. If prison does not change the individual, murder eliminates them. Yet, a number of people are unchangeable. For some, to abandon their life is better than abandoning their beliefs. A scholarly critic states in his article “The New Verbal Order” that “The enduring value of *1984* lies in its graphic portrayal of a society in which people exchange their freedoms for the enslavement of an unreflective acceptance of politically orthodox thoughts” (Charles). A government should not define an individual through the standards of an orthodox society. In *1984*, the authorities go as far as destroying their citizen’s human qualities and making them characterless robots. The people are not even aware of the corruption they are involved in. Over time, an individual in a free society eventually becomes what he potentially can be. Naturally, once individuals define themselves, they are able to grasp the world and preserve their individuality and integrity. However, a totalitarian government is daunting and eradicates all forms of uniqueness. Dictatorial authorities search for ways to gain complete influence over their citizens. For example, the idea that, “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU” (Orwell 2) solidifies the fact that the leaders are omniscient. With a mixture of unlimited terror and manipulation, man loses all sense of individuality in a totalitarian society.

[EXCERPT – NOT A COMPLETE PAPER – PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE ARE ERRORS IN THIS PAPER! THIS IS JUST AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO WEAVE QUOTES FROM NOVEL AND RESEARCH]