

George Orwell: Born Eric Arthur Blair, June 25, 1903, Motihari, Bihar, India. His father worked for the Opium Department of the colonial British government. Raised mainly in England, joined the police force in Burma. Worked as a colonial police officer for several years, became increasingly hostile to British colonialism and its effects on both the colonized and the British; resigned while on sick leave in England. Lived in Paris for ~ 20 months, doing menial work. Taught for a while, fought and was almost killed in the Spanish Civil War. Nineteen Eighty-Four was finished in December 1948, published June 8, 1949; he died the next January.

Other works – essays ("A Hanging," "Shooting and Elephant"), poetry, Down and Out in Paris and London, Animal Farm, historical and autobiographical sketches. Wrote essays and book reviews for generally left-wing periodicals. Wife Eileen worked for censorship dept. during WWII; died in 1945, months before Animal Farm was published. (The first publisher withdrew support as a result of pressure by Peter Smollett, a member of the Information Research Department, the propaganda arm of the Foreign Office, who later turned out to be a Soviet spy (recruited by Kim Philby. Later the IRD paid to publish foreign-language editions of the book, as propaganda.)

#### Events in Orwell's world:

- Stalinism overtaking more moderate Socialism
- Communist takeover of all China – ongoing since 1927, almost complete when the book was published.
- Britain – bankruptcy, rationing, loss of Empire,\* decline in world status – "Airstrip One," "Oceania"  
Colonies/protectorates lost to Empire:
  - Egypt 1922
  - Iraq 1932
  - Ireland 1937
  - Hong Kong 1945
  - Pakistan, **India** 1947
  - Ceylon, **Burma** 1948
- Increasing government control of resources including information – e.g. BBC

#### THEMES/ISSUES

- Motivations of the truly ruthless – not evil for sake of higher good, but "the object of power is power"
  - Cf. the many who support evil means believing them necessary for security or other good
  - Cf. Abu Ghraib with CIA abuses
- The Proles – cf. Marxism with how communism really turned out
- Changing truth/history –
  - "the big lie" (origins in Mein Kampf)
  - Elimination of any ability to learn from the past
  - cf. Stalinist & anti-Stalinist propaganda; censorship
  - the WWW; digital books; Wikipedia
- Newspeak and Doublethink
  - Changing language as a way of changing thought
- Big Brother Is Watching You
  - Benevolent surveillance
  - Loss of privacy = loss of dignity = loss of will to act
- Thought Police
- Repression of sexuality

**Key passages:**

'The old civilizations claimed that they were founded on love or justice. Ours is founded upon hatred. In our world there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. Everything else we shall destroy – everything. Already we are breaking down the habits of thought which have survived from before the Revolution. We have cut the links between child and parent, and between man and man, and between man and woman. No one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer. But in the future there will be no wives and no friends. Children will be taken from their mothers at birth, as one takes eggs from a hen. The sex instinct will be eradicated. Procreation will be an annual formality like the renewal of a ration card. We shall abolish the orgasm. Our neurologists are at work upon it now. There will be no loyalty, except loyalty towards the Party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. There will be no laughter, except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. There will be no art, no literature, no science. When we are omnipotent we shall have no more need of science. There will be no distinction between beauty and ugliness. There will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. All competing pleasures will be destroyed. But always – do not forget this, Winston – always there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler. Always, at every moment, there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless. If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – for ever.'

'We are different from all the oligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just round the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now do you begin to understand me?'

Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

**George Santayana, The Life of Reason, 1906**

In the big lie there is always a certain force of credibility; because the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted in the deeper strata of their emotional nature than consciously or voluntarily; and thus in the primitive simplicity of their minds they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods. It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. Even though the facts which prove this to be so may be brought clearly to their minds, they will still doubt and waver and will continue to think that there may be some other explanation. For the grossly impudent lie always leaves traces behind it, even after it has been nailed down, a fact which is known to all expert liars in this world and to all who conspire together in the art of lying.

**Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, 1925**

In so far as he had time to remember it, he was not troubled by the fact that every word he murmured into the speakwrite, every stroke of his ink-pencil, was a deliberate lie. He was as anxious as anyone else in the Department that the forgery should be perfect. On the morning of the sixth day the dribble of cylinders slowed down. For as much as half an hour nothing came out of the tube; then one more cylinder, then nothing. Everywhere at about the same time the work was easing off. A deep and as it were secret sigh went through the Department. A mighty deed, which could never be mentioned, had been achieved. It was now impossible for any human being to prove by documentary evidence that the war with Eurasia had ever happened.

**Nineteen Eighty-Four**

All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary. In no case would it have been possible, once the deed was done, to prove that any falsification had taken place.

**Nineteen Eighty-Four**

To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone:

From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink – greetings !

**Nineteen Eighty-Four: Winston Smith's diary**



"Unperson" commissar Nikolai Yezhov after falling from favor and being executed in 1940.

"This is the operative statement. The others are inoperative." –Ron Ziegler, April 17, 1973

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**The New York Times**

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## **Amazon Erases Orwell Books From Kindle**

By BRAD STONE

In George Orwell's "1984," government censors erase all traces of news articles embarrassing to Big Brother by sending them down an incineration chute called the "memory hole." On Friday, it was "1984" and another Orwell book, "Animal Farm," that were dropped down the memory hole — by Amazon.com.

In a move that angered customers and generated waves of online pique, Amazon remotely deleted some digital editions of the books from the Kindle devices of readers who had bought them.

An Amazon spokesman, Drew Herdener, said in an e-mail message that the books were added to the Kindle store by a company that did not have rights to them, using a self-service function. "When we were notified of this by the rights holder, we removed the illegal copies from our systems and from customers' devices, and refunded customers," he said. . . .

Digital books bought for the Kindle are sent to it over a wireless network. Amazon can also use that network to synchronize electronic books between devices — and apparently to make them vanish.

An authorized digital edition of "1984" from its American publisher, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, was still available on the Kindle store Friday night, but there was no such version of "Animal Farm."

People who bought the rescinded editions of the books reacted with indignation, while acknowledging the literary ironies involved. "Of all the books to recall," said Charles Slater, an executive with a sheet-music retailer in Philadelphia, who bought the digital edition of "1984" for 99 cents last month. "I never imagined that Amazon actually had the right, the authority or even the ability to delete something that I had already purchased." . . . Amazon appears to have deleted other purchased e-books from Kindles recently. Customers commenting on Web forums reported the disappearance of digital editions of the Harry Potter books and the novels of Ayn Rand over similar issues.

Retailers of physical goods cannot, of course, force their way into a customer's home to take back a purchase, no matter how bootlegged it turns out to be. Yet Amazon appears to maintain a unique tether to the digital content it sells for the Kindle. . . . "It illustrates how few rights you have when you buy an e-book from Amazon," said Bruce Schneier, chief security technology officer for British Telecom and an expert on computer security and commerce. "As a Kindle owner, I'm frustrated. I can't lend people books and I can't sell books that I've already read, and now it turns out that I can't even count on still having my books tomorrow."

Justin Gawronski, a 17-year-old from the Detroit area, was reading "1984" on his Kindle for a summer assignment and lost all his notes and annotations when the file vanished. "They didn't just take a book back, they stole my work," he said.

On the Internet, of course, there is no such thing as a memory hole. While the copyright on "1984" will not expire until 2044 in the United States, it has already expired in other countries, including Canada, Australia and Russia. Web sites in those countries offer digital copies of the book free to all comers.