

Is privacy still  
private?



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“ Privacy is not something that I'm merely entitled to, it's an absolute prerequisite” (Marlone Brando). The citizens of Oceania are under constant surveillance; the Party wants to make sure they are following all the rules. In George Orwell's *1984*, the Party and Big Brother have control over the people, even the power to control their beliefs and their love using physical and mental restrictions, propaganda, surveillance, and control over language. Today advancements have played a huge role in the way society communicates and functions. There has also been new ways of capturing, recording and documenting the lives of the people. The technological advancements implicated in today's society are slowly getting closer to the warning signs that George Orwell's *1984* was trying to show his readers including microphones, cameras, and media, all invading society's privacy.

Firstly, there are more than enough ways that the government today and Big Brother use to keep surveillance over society. One of the smallest and easiest ways to gain surveillance over the people are microphones. In 1984, Big Brother placed microphones because they wanted to make sure that society's thoughts matched the ' ideal' society. In modern day society microphones are placed for different reasons yet the invasion of privacy is still relevant, as an example “ city buses in Baltimore, MD have been outfitted with microphones and are wirelessly transmitting everything being said to the government. The government is using microphones to record us” (NCAVF). The placement of these microphones were implemented to not only hear drivers but gain information on accidents, yet the invasion of privacy is still very clear. The government should know better than to break the fourth amendment; a right given to the people by the government. Additionally, Big

Brother was placing microphones to purposely listen to the citizens of Oceania: " in general you could not assume that you were much safer in the country than in London. There were no telescreens, of course, but there was always the danger of concealed microphones by which your voice might be picked up and recognized; besides, it was not easy to make a journey by yourself without attracting attention" (Orwell 23). The Party placed these microphones around Oceania to capture evidence of the citizens doing something that is not allowed. Big Brother was constantly invading the people's privacy for their own gain. In both *1984* and modern day, society's privacy is being invaded by a higher power through the use of concealed microphones. The microphones can capture information that can easily be used against the public without their knowledge that it was even recorded. The use of surveillance through microphones today is very similar to those in *1984* which leads some to believe that this was one of the warnings Orwell was trying to present.

Furthermore, yet another way that Big Brother is presented in today's society is through the use of cameras. The government is using cameras to record daily activities of society almost everywhere. In *1984*, the Party had control over the telescreens which could be used as a camera to view the citizens of Oceania: " it was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were in any public place or within range of a telescreen. The smallest thing could give you away" (Orwell 59). The telescreens were used to keep control of the Paroles daily activities to make sure they were doing what the Party allowed. By using cameras to control the citizens the Party is invading the privacy of the people. In addition, in modern day society

technology is so advanced that the government is able to hack into systems to have eyes everywhere they need. As an example, the Long Beach police “[...] set up a system to tap into hundreds of privately owned cameras that are part of the city streetscape” (Par. 3, Winston). Although the police use this tapping to gain more information about those who break the law; it is still unknown to those who own the cameras that they are being tampered with. This is a complete invasion of privacy towards modern society as they are unknown that they are being watched by the government. Telescreens may seem unreasonable to modern day society but little do they know cameras are technically the same thing. The constant surveillance over the Paroles can be seen today with the use of cameras everywhere and anywhere; which leads to another warning sign that Orwell was trying to present.

On the contrary, some could say that society is given the information that their private information could be used or made public through the use of social media. Almost all social media sites disclose in their privacy policy that they can comb “ through the information you provided and, even if there is no cause, hand it over to the government if asked because of the lack of a federal statutory or constitutional right for the government to have a reason to ask for this information” (Par. 5, Hope). Many people never look at the terms and conditions or the privacy policy disclosed when signing up. They are easily giving away the information that they want to keep private all for social media. Nevertheless, society might be giving away their information to companies, but the government has no right to take that information without reason. The government has no right to invade

companies to gain the users private information; yet it was still done. In 2013 Edward Snowden leaked information that “ the US National Security Agency (NSA) was collecting the telephone records of tens of millions of Americans” (Par. 1 BBC). The government had no reason or right to gain information to the telephone calls of millions of users. Once again they are violating the fourth amendment, the right that protects the people from unlawful searches without a warrant, in which they implemented to protect the people from the government. Although the people might not know they are giving their information to a company, it gives no right to the government to take it as they please. As for Big Brother, they have no right to control the thoughts and love interests of the citizens with no questions asked. Orwell implemented the use of media control by the government as a warning sign that media nowadays may not be as safe as society makes it seem.

To conclude, in *1984* George Orwell was trying to include a warning sign to his readers about how technology can be used against them through the use of microphones, cameras, and social media. Cameras can be used to see the daily activities of society while microphones can be easily hidden to listen into conversations. The government has no right to gain information on the public without reason, yet it has been done using social media. Orwell presented many warnings throughout *1984*, his most relevant one being privacy. Privacy is not something that society is given as a gift but it is a basic human right that everyone deserves.

## **Works Cited**

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