

# Altering history with censorship in 1984 and 2012

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Often described as the “destruction of free speech”, censorship consists of altering or deleting a message between the sender and receiver, often without notice or their consent. Free speech, on the other hand, addresses the right to express liberally without any restrictions. These two contradicting concepts often cause controversies, especially over finding the equilibrium between the two. It is evident that each plays very important roles in the lives of many citizens where they are free to discover the truth and to express their thoughts from them. There are various forms of censorship; some may completely alter the original message or some may simply be hiding the truth. Even though harmonizing free speech and censorship is challenging, permitting the oblivion of information is no less a mean of censorship than was the job of Winston Smith in the dystopian community of 1984.

Censorship, a major theme in 1984, evidently plays a huge role in the altering of history. With public documents redrafted to eliminate “unpersons” (52) and photographs falsified in the Ministry of Truth, the Party of Airstrip One administers some of the worst dystopian forms of restriction in history. The telescreen is one major form of censorship that the government imposes as all types of production are extremely exaggerated to force the citizens to believe that the nation’s government is rapidly growing, while in reality, it is the exact opposite. These forms of censorship are ongoing and are endless in the city. For most of his miserable life, Winston is charged with the task of eradicating references to an “unperson” in a newspaper article. He is also put up with the task of writing an article about

Comrade Ogilvy, an entirely non-existent party member who portrays superior heroism.

Although these extreme restrictions imposed in Airstrip One that alter history might seem distinct to a dystopian society, similar forms also take place in today's "free" world. In addition to censorship imposed by the government in today's world just like in 1984, advancements in technology has allowed organizations and companies to also control information in a similar way. Google is one such example, which uses its search engine to censor history. This is possible as Google may remove search results that have been considered not being useful or applicable. Similar to how the Party has a dominant power to control information for its citizens, Google can do the same by restricting content that may be upsetting or not meet the desires of either the authority or the public.

In contrast to truly altering or changing the past, allowing information to be forgotten is another form of censorship, which should not be considered to be less severe. As mentioned previously, in 1984, Winston is appointed to eliminate references to "unpersons" in a newspaper article. In his thoughts of a dystopian ideal of this censorship, Orwell mentions that "in a time of deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act" (186). In the society of 1984, the Party allowed such a large amount of information to be forgotten that truth hardly existed anymore. Even a type of censorship that may simply hide the truth, rather than hiding it, is just as harmful as it can eliminate the idea of "truth".

Since information is constantly being hidden and forgotten, the citizens completely lose the sense of what is fact and what is not. In today's society, the concept of "right to be forgotten" is becoming common over various forms of information and is posing a big threat to the public. This is done in many countries, companies, and even individuals with an aim of erasing inconvenient references to articles or other materials from search engines and other websites. Recently in Spain, controversies rose over references to a crucial article in regards to a plastic surgeon, who was at one point involved in a dispute with one of his patients. After his issue was settled, he urged Google to allow a payment that will filter out search results that mention the dispute when his name is searched.

Amazon performed a similar action with a specific lineup of Kindle E-books. In 2009, Amazon deleted purchased E-book from Kindle devices without the readers' consent. Ironically, the books that were sent down the memory hole were Orwell's 1984 and Animal Farm. Because these books were not properly licensed, Amazon hoped that the illegal digital copies would be forgotten by deleting them from their customers without their consent.

In the 1984 dystopia, providing as less information as possible stands as important pillar for the Party of Airstrip One. As Orwell mentions, "who controls the past, controls the present", the dominant power of the authority allows them to provide a bare minimum of information to the public, to hide some of the daunting reality that lies behind the city. Similar to the situation in the 1984 society, our modern world also consists of powerful governments that provide little information, often hiding the truth. China, known for having one of the strictest censorships in place, has implemented a <https://assignbuster.com/altering-history-with-censorship-in-1984-and-2012/>

dedicated server to filter Google search results that may pertain to political unrest. These servers even have the capability of dropping phone calls when they detect a harmful word.

With this harsh censorship in place, so much truth is hidden behind the walls of these servers that may never reach the citizens of nations. In order for a society to function properly without restrictions and constraints, the citizens must be capable of discovering the truth. When censorship is at the center of a community, the border between truth and lies begins to fade. In its place, truth becomes what the authority believes should be the truth, rather than its reality. In both the societies of 1984 and 2012, the “right to be forgotten” seems to take control over “opportunity to dispute”. Rather than leaving questionable or harmful information for the public to dispute and argue, the authorities are automatically censoring, either by altering or deleting, these types of resources so that there are not even accessible to the citizens.

For that reason, deleting and allowing information to be forgotten is equally as restricting as changing and altering the material. Either way, people are prohibited from seeing the truth to express their thoughts, which violates freedom of speech and causes the loss individual opinions.