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Professor

Class

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State-Controlled Media Propaganda in 1984

Fear is the ultimate tool of the controllers of the state in George Orwell's 1984. It is not so much the thought of death, but the fear of persecution and punishment that fills Winston with anxiety. However, the fear is reinforced through State sanctioned programs of propaganda. These programs are totalitarian in scope, offering people little alternative. All of the media, as well as the official narratives, are unified together so the voices of opposition are completely shut out. The message is carefully scripted to imprison people through a sense of collectivism. But also they are confined by their own individual psychology; of alienation, inferiority, and insulation. The messages are reinforced by a number of tactics, so people are confined by both ignorance and fear of retribution. The State uses repetition, persistent inverted messages, fear of an external enemy, and collectivism's positive message itself, to oppress the individual and break the will.

Conformity to an oppressive system involves consistency and redundancy. Slogans are used to reduce language to easy sound bites that are memorable and noncomplex. "The woman on the telescreen had started a new song," the narrator explains. "Her voice seemed to stick into his brain like jagged splinters of glass" (Orwell 193). Pamphlets are mass produced in an attempt to control the unpredictable male sexual energy. Books were commoditized, and were considered things that "had to be produced, like jam or bootlaces." They were created for mass consumption and control, not liberation. Julia is bored by them, and exclaims, "They only have six plots, but they swap them round a bit" (Orwell 247). The message is consistent, and repeated.

Another tactic the State uses to control people is inversion. Inversion is where messages are twisted, so that associations are made between ideas that would not normally coexist. For example, from Goldstein's *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, a message repeated by the Party was that "War is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength" (Orwell 350). A rational person might see that the concepts are opposed, but the mechanism of propaganda merge these ideas. Another example is how the State switches the enemy so that people do not even know who they are fighting anymore. The narrator writes, "It had been announced that Oceania was not after all at war with Eurasia. Oceania was at war with Eastasia. Eurasia was an ally (Orwell 344). By the end of the book no one even remembers who the enemy is or was. Winston remembers Eurasia and Eastasia, but he does not know who was at war with whom. He is not even clear that there was a war at all. O'Brien reminds him, "Oceania is at war with Eastasia. Do you remember that now...Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia; since the beginning of your life, since the beginning of the Party, since the beginning of history, the war has continued without a break, always the same war" (Orwell 492). Collective memory is reprogrammed. Nobody is even clear about who they are fighting. It all becomes the same war.

A third tactic the State used for purposes of the social control was to always having an external enemy. This diverts attention from criticism of the State, and promotes fear. Always there is a threat of war, an enemy, or a terrorist problem abroad. This justifies militarism and domestic control. Outsiders are scapegoated and persecuted, and this is justified. "Foreigners," notes the narrator, "Whether from Eurasia or from Eastasia, were a kind of strange animal" (Orwell 218). They were removed from view, kept as prisoners, and not allowed to correspond with people. They were distant prisoners, and therefore easy to dehumanize and blame. Often it was just the idea of an enemy that was enough, and the enemy did not even need to have a face.

Last, a sense of solidarity and brotherhood is promoted with a cause. The power of the State is daily celebrated, and propaganda broadcasts attempted to put a virtuous face on an oppressive regime. Propaganda is seamlessly blended with entertainment, so that even a “Department of Fiction” is involved in deciding the direction of popular literature. A sense of optimism about a common purpose runs through all communications. Even though people recognize the hypocrisy, the message stays consistent. The State is great and powerful, and individualism must be sacrificed.

The State maintains its power through deceptive and deliberate propaganda in 1984. Though the characters recognize that reality and the official narrative diverges, they also feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the system, and fear it. By the end of book the main characters finally succumb. Something was killed in their breasts. They felt “burnt out, cauterized out” (Orwell 553). The future and the past are continuous. The State successfully controls its representations, and reprograms the present.



Works Cited

Orwell, George. *1984*. New York, Signet Classic, 1961. Ebook version.

