
The Impact Of George Orwell On American Culture

George Orwell was born in 1903 in Motihari, India under the name Eric Arthur Blair. In his web article about Orwell, George Woodcock explains Orwell grew up in an atmosphere of “impoverished snobbery” (2018). At an early age, his parents sent him to a preparatory boarding school on the Sussex coast, where he was set apart from other boys due to his poverty and his intellectual brilliance (Woodcock). In his biography *Student Companion to George Orwell*, Mitzi Brunsdale explains since Orwell was alive “during the turbulent first half of the twentieth century, he witnessed some of the most wrenching upheavals that shaped the modern world,” and these experiences had a major impact on his writing style (*Companion to Orwell*). Similarly, the biography continues to expand and explain how Orwell found safety in books and “the more he read, the angrier he became at injustice and the more he yearned for the happiness and security traditional English values like decency, integrity, and compassion offered” (Brunsdale). From a very early age, Orwell became involved with literature against injustices in society, and his interest as a boy shaped the way he wrote his own novels. In his article George Woodstock explains how as an adult Orwell was denied from the military and found himself serving for Broadcasting Corporation or BBC (2018). However, he soon left the BBC and became the literary editor of the *Tribune*, a left-wing socialist paper associated with Labor leader Aneurin Bevan (Woodcock, 2018). Other than his burial “there was nothing religious about him” and “he knew that an anti-natural time was coming, where everything ancient and, in sum, everything beautiful would become extremely suspicious,” wrote Philippe Sollers in his article, *George Orwell: Leftward All!* (2010). Orwell did not spend his life tangled up in religion, but instead, he voiced what he viewed as the truth. Orwell’s early life experiences inspired his harsh view of totalitarian governments in his novels.

Over the course of his career, Orwell wrote novels about social injustice, many of which are well-known and studied today. Some of his earlier works include *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Burmese Days*, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *Homage to Catalonia*, and his most famous works, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. In addition to his novels, Orwell also wrote essays and pieces of writing in journals. In his novel, Brunsdale explains all of Orwell’s pieces have a purpose behind them since “Orwell’s times forced him to defend freedom by writing for political purpose, for him, liberty meant telling the truth, the objective truth which people usually don’t want to hear” (*Companion to Orwell*). According to the same source, Orwell “taught himself to tap into the social shifts taking place in his century, so that much of his writing resembles fictionalized sociological tracts” and he used current problems the world was facing and displayed them in a utopian society in order to highlight the injustice of society (Brunsdale). Further analysis of Orwell’s style is presented in Christopher Hitchens’ article, *Why Orwell Matters*, Hitches points out Orwell’s continuous “opposition to fascism and to Stalinism -- to the totalitarian temptation, -- and his constant critique of empire and the class system” (*Orwell Matters*, 2002). Orwell had a tendency of writing about totalitarian dictatorships and he used examples such as the Russian Revolution to base his stories. Orwell wrote challenging novels because he wanted “there to be an argument, confrontation, disagreement” and “he didn’t want anyone blindly taught as a good example” (Hitchens). Typically, his novels went against what was considered acceptable and he took on the responsibility of educating the lower classes about their leaders. Orwell’s novels challenge people to think for themselves and start interesting debates about how society is run. In one of his popular novels, *Animal Farm*, Orwell uses allegory to discuss the Russian

Revolution.

One of Orwell's most famous novels is *Animal Farm*. In a criticism about the novel, George Woodcock wrote "*Animal Farm* was one of Orwell's finest works, full of wit and fantasy and admirably written" (2010). This story is widely explored throughout the nation and used in classrooms to teach important themes and history. The plot includes a group of farm animals who overthrew their abusive human owners in order to start a society of their own. The animals "intelligent and power-loving leaders, the pigs, subvert the revolution and form a dictatorship whose bondage is even more oppressive and heartless than their former human masters" (Woodcock). The story alludes to important historical events such as the Russian Revolution, the Boxer Rebellion, and the Cold War. Through the use of allegory one theme of the novel shows "the subversively easy way means subjectively reducing complex nuances of language too often opposite-meaning minimal units---in the process abandoning the objective truth that keeps us free" (Brunsdale). In the 2002 article *Why Orwell Matters* it is stated "*Animal Farm* made him famous and, for the first time, prosperous" and is one of his most popular novels (Hitchens). In a similar manner, Orwell continues to talk about dictatorship in more of his novels, and further attempts to point out the flaws of human government in 1984.

In another one of Orwell's novels, 1984, he continues to speak of totalitarian governments. This novel features a utopian society where every aspect of citizens' lives are controlled by the government. In his article, *How Orwell Predicted the Challenge of Writing Today*, Gessen writes "Orwell's Appendix to Nineteen Eighty-Four, "The Principles of Newspeak" leaps from Everyman to every social system, from the doomed individual to any society that dooms itself by perverting language and is servant technology to conceal, mystify, and deceive" (2018). In the novel the government removes words from the dictionary and over time degradation of language occurs. This theme shows totalitarianism since the government restrict the information of the people in order to become wiser. Orwell personally believed every person "can exercise clear headed common sense and reject the perversion of language and the blithe and lethal disregard of historical fact and objective truth--- if the individual is willing, as he was, to pay the price" (Brunsdale). 1984 presents the topic of making choices and suffering the consequences. Orwell used this novel to present the idea all humans are free to do as they choose as long as they are willing to accept their fate. The main character, Winston Smith "rather than having his face torn off by rats in the torture chamber" accuses his girlfriend (Sollers). Orwell uses this cruel story to show humans can be broken down and are capable of being controlled. Winston's betrayal of the woman he loved for the government highlights the theme of totalitarianism and Orwell warns against giving a government an abundance of power. Similarly, George Woodcock in an article evaluates the novel and explores the thought 1984 "gains much of its power from the comprehensive rigour with which it extends the premises of totalitarianism to their logical end: the love of power and domination over others" (2018). Critics speak about the uniqueness of the story's ending and evaluate Orwell's statements about dictatorship. 1984 is unparalleled and no other author has shared the harshness of society in the same way as Orwell. Through his work, Orwell was able to highlight defects in society and changed the optimistic view of most Americans. These two novels, with dozens of other novels, short stories, and movies, illustrate George Orwell's impact on American Culture.

Orwell's novels challenge the status quo and show readers dark realizations about freedom in society. In his article *How Orwell Predicted the Challenge of Writing today*, Gessen talks about Orwell's novels, praising his works saying "these are the very books that facilitate conversation, that create mental public space, that influence the viewpoint of one's

contemporaries. Without these books, politics---the discussion of how we inhabit a city or country or planet together--- is impossible” (2018). Orwell’s work is widely talked about. Discussions, arguments, and debates have been about the interesting themes Orwell presents. Orwell’s struggles and views of totalitarianism formed the basis for his novels, which, in turn, shaped our current understanding of totalitarianism (Gessen, 2018). His novels are used in classrooms across the U.S. to teach students about dictatorship and mistakes made in the past. Hopefully, the cruelty mentioned in Orwell’s novels will be protected against, since authors such as Orwell have given us these tools. Christopher Hitchens in his article, Why Orwell Matters, praises Orwell’s unsurpassed achievements of turning lucid writing into an art, and raising the idea of clarity in writing (2002). Hitchens also says the world has not “reached a point where Orwell is not relevant” and his work will be used for many years to warn generations about the dangers of society (2002). George Woodcock, in his article, thanks Orwell for his “warning of the potential dangers of totalitarianism” and for making “a deep impression on his contemporaries and upon subsequent readers” (2018). Orwell’s warnings to the world have been viewed as a gift of literature as well as his ideas for the basis for the world’s understanding of political injustice and basic rights. His ideas and stories are parallel to historical events and they help analyze apprehensive moments and set a tone for the future. Orwell left a legacy with the many of the coined words and phrases from his novels, which became bywords for modern political abuses (Woodcock). His creativity with his language style defined some of the political horrors found around the world. 1984 received an award in 1975 for the All Time Best Novel and received many Prometheus Hall of Fame Awards for various works (Woodcock, 2018). Culture has forever been altered by Orwell’s divergent viewpoints and warnings against dictatorship. Through all of his contributions to society, George Orwell’s influence can be heavily seen in many outlets.

Through his popular novels, George Orwell was able to shed some light on totalitarian governments and impact American society. No other author was able to take historical moments and current problems the is facing and turn it into a story in literature to serve the purpose of not only entertainment but also important lessons about the discrepancies in governments. Orwell is known for voicing the truth when the rest of the world is too scared to. His goal was to initiate discussion and confrontation. Both Animal Farm and 1984 are read in classrooms to this day, and they teach students some of the heaviest truths of our world. Orwell’s novels encase important themes ranging from Stalinism to love. His troubles as a child and experiences with the world’s cruelty inspired him to share the truth about a damaged world. Orwell’s work blatantly shows a broken society and presents his readers with the heavily weighted question; is anything truly free?