

OCEANIA vs. THE SOVIET UNION

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[Assignment: Using the technique of comparison, discuss two similar activities or objects. Think about these questions: Who is your audience? What do your readers already know and what must be explained to them? Will subject by subject or point by point structure best serve your purpose?]

(1) The most talked about book in the year 1984 was 1984, by George Orwell. When people think about this book, they think of a totalitarian government and its control over people. With 1984 more than a year behind us, not much thought is given to Orwell's society. But what many people don't realize is that for millions of people in the Soviet Union, 1984 is a daily reality.

(2) One of the parallels between these two societies is the benefits that government officials receive because of the absolute power the government has. In Oceania, the society depicted by Orwell, these leaders were able to receive better food and clothing, larger apartments, and an overall higher standard of living than the ordinary citizen. They also had special privileges such as being able to turn off their telescreens, the device that resembles a television which the government uses to keep tabs on the people. The Soviet Union also practices a similar system of special privileges. High officials in the communist party receive all their food free, and they receive limousines for personal use and mansions in the country when the ordinary people live in small, crowded apartments in the city. They even have their own special stores where they can get almost anything they desire, while the ordinary citizen must wait for such necessities as soap.

(3) The governments of Oceania and the Soviet Union both rewrite history to protect their claim that they are infallible and only work for the good of the people. In Oceania, history was rewritten every day to cover up the shortcomings of the government in production goals and war effort statistics. The history before the party came into power also had to be rewritten so the people would have no way of knowing the government was oppressing them. The Soviet Union rewrites its history to cover up the actions of its previous leaders that are contrary to present communist ideals. This is most clearly seen in the secrecy surrounding the Stalin era. Nothing about Stalin is written in history books, so the younger generation has no way of learning about the millions of people Stalin had murdered in concentration camps. Instead he is portrayed as a perfect leader who should be admired.

(4) The concept of double-think as portrayed in Orwell's 1984 was the way in which Big Brother controlled

the thoughts of the people. Double-think is being able to believe two totally opposite ideas at the same time. In Oceania, this is made possible through the schools where the ideals of Big Brother are constantly pounded into children's heads. But when these children grow up, they begin to realize that not all of what they have been taught is true. Publicly, they still repeat what they have been taught out of fear of reprisal from the authorities, but they know that what they are repeating is false. This concept of double-think is very much in use in the Soviet Union too. From childhood, people are indoctrinated with the ideals of Lenin and Communism, but as they grow older they begin to see the faults in their system and start to believe the contrary of what they have been taught. Soviet citizens, however, keep these beliefs private for fear of being shipped off to a forced labor camp in Siberia.

(5) In each government, there is an unquenchable thirst for power which leads to the silencing of all opposition. In Oceania, people who voice their opposition to the government are quickly dealt with by the Thought Police, the eyes and ears of the government. The Thought Police arrest dissenters and brainwash them into accepting the ideals of the party. This is done to wipe out all opposition which could lead to a revolt of the people that would weaken the government's power over the people. The Soviet Union deals with dissenters in the same manner. When the government detects any dissent, it quickly acts to silence it, for if dissent were allowed, it could lead to an uprising of the people. First the dissenters are black-listed, which makes it almost impossible for them to ever find a job. If that does not silence the opponents, they are sent to forced labor camps in Siberia where they will not be heard.

(6) The most striking resemblance between the two societies is the government's control over the lives of the people. In Oceania, the government has totally destroyed family life and trust between people. They must constantly be on their guard because they are always being watched through the telescreens or by the Thought Police. The people have no one to confide in. The Soviet Union has many of the same elements of control as Oceania. A file is kept on every person in which his activities are written down. Citizens must even have a special pass to travel within their own country. This makes it easier for the government to keep track of people. The KGB, the Soviet Union's Thought Police, keeps a close eye on people by bugging their telephones and censoring their mail. Soviet citizens also cannot trust or confide in anyone. Because of this, the people go along willingly with what the government tells them, even if they know it is wrong, for fear of being labeled dissenters.

(7) It is clear to see that Oceania and the Soviet Union are very similar to each other. Most people don't realize that their fear of 1984 becoming a reality has

already come true.

Information about Russian life taken from The Russians by
Hedrick Smith.