

Why *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Should Be Required Reading for Every University Student

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Abstract

This article argues for the inclusion of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as obligatory reading for university students due to its profound reflection on the value of history. While previous studies have explored themes of totalitarianism, love, alienation, political allegiance, hierarchy, and technology in the novel, this research focuses on the importance of history for university students. The essay begins by highlighting how studying history can help students understand people, societies, and the processes of change that shape communities. It emphasizes the acquisition of crucial skills, such as evaluating competing interpretations and analyzing evidence. The article then addresses challenges to the utility of history, including objections raised by Henry Ford and other concerns. Finally, it examines specific hazards resulting from a lack of historical knowledge, drawing examples from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Keywords: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, history, university students, value of history, understanding societies, historical change, critical thinking, historical knowledge

1. Introduction

As Marks (2015) notably argues, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has undeniably influenced public and intellectual imagination for half a century. It is acknowledged that one of the critical features of the government depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is its constant revision of history. As I read, it became clear that this novel is a remarkable reflection on the force of history. Other study subjects on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are primarily about totalitarianism, undermining of love, sense of alienation, political allegiance, hierarchy, and the use of technologies. In contrast, my research topic in this article is the value of history for university students. In terms of this essay's argument, I believe *Nineteen Eighty-Four* should be obligatory reading for every university student. To demonstrate my point, I will first discuss the importance of history for university students, such as how history can help university students understand people and societies, understand change and how our community came to be, as well as allow them to acquire some skills, such as the ability to evaluate competing interpretations, evidencing, etc. Nonetheless, the focus then moves to particular challenges to the usefulness of history, particularly those raised by Henry Ford, as well as other concerns. Finally, it finishes with specific hazards that happened as a result of a lack of historical knowledge, as demonstrated by particular cases from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

2. The Importance of History for University Students

Some historians are frequently questioned, "Why study history, and what is the point?" "Why on earth would you investigate a set of events that occurred in the distant past?" The answer is that history cannot be avoided. History may be viewed as humanity's heritage, providing a cohesive link between the past and the present. In this sense, it is not a 'dead' item but instead has a deep relationship with present existence. And, based on what

we've learned as students, we're supposed to look at this link in the long run.

All humans and peoples serve as telling examples in this context. Languages, for instance, individuals employ inherited languages from the past. People live in communities with a strong sense of religion and various cultures, none of which were established in a single instant. Even shared innovations, such as paper, lighting, pencils, and other essentials, are inherited from the past. And each individual is born with a unique variation of the genome, an inherited genetic blueprint that has evolved throughout the history of the human species' existence (Corfield, 2008). It would be difficult to predict what would happen to our life if we lost everything from history. People are more likely to return to the beginning and restart. How can civilisation progress if this is the case? On the other hand, the fundamental reasons we may currently live in peace and safety are due to the solid and sound rules created in the past. There will be numerous adverse effects if individuals do not recognise the heritage of history.

As a result, having a deeper understanding of the relationship between the past and present may considerably aid us in understanding human beings on a fundamental level. History is not only valuable but also crucial in this aspect.

3. History Teaches University Students Understand People and Societies

First and foremost, history may serve as a repository of human and societal behaviour (Stearns, 1998). Despite the efforts of other topics, it appears that understanding humans and society remains difficult. Objectively, relying solely on current facts will make it difficult to go forward in some aspects. For example, analysing conflicts will be impossible without using history as a reference, especially in such a secure and tranquil macroworld. It cannot be denied that certain scientists have established some rules and theories of human behaviour, but this still needs historical evidence. Although experiments may be designed to evaluate people's behaviour based on specific persons and events, other features, such as politics, religious efforts, or military intervention, cannot be put up as studies (Stearns, 1998). Thus, history should be an experimental chamber; even if data from the past is problematic when applied to modern practice, it is still vital evidence of why humans do this or in such an environment. History is a mirror, a study of national and global situations. History contains some startling parallels. Some parallels between historical events and historical individuals will educate future generations and take lessons from them as a reference. Admittedly, history gives extraordinary evidence of reflections and analysis of how society functions. Hence every university student should understand this to manage their lives better. This is essentially why university students should study history.

4. History Teaches University Students About Change and How Our Society Came to Be

Furthermore, as already said, history is unavoidable. According to Stearns (1998), the past influences the present and so the future. When people try to figure out why something happened, whether it was a change in political party domination, a dramatic change in the youth fat rate, or a conflict in some areas, we would better seek variables that emerged earlier. Occasionally recent times is sufficient to explain an extensive development, but more often than not, people must look further back to find the roots of change. In this sense, only by studying history can people understand how things change, how forces drive changes, and what qualities of society remain despite the change.

5. History Helps University Students Acquire Some Skills

5.1 The Ability to Evaluate Competing Interpretations

Ultimately, mastering history may give university students a variety of abilities, such as the capacity to assess alternative interpretations, evidence, and previous examples of change (Stearns, 1998). With a deeper grasp of history, university students may practice classifying variations, which are frequently distinct and contradictory (Stearns, 1998). The primary goal of history is to understand how society works to be utilised to analyse current events. In this light, knowing how to recognise and access paradoxical interpretations is a real talent for citizens, much alone university students. While the experience of filtering the past might create a feeling of criticism, it can also be used to make political assertions about the glory of national or ethnic identity. The study of history does not diminish devotion or dedication in any way. Still, it does highlight the importance of evaluating arguments and offers opportunities to participate in discussion and gain viewpoints.

5.2 The Ability to Evaluate Evidence

Historians have gained a great lot of expertise in dealing with and accessing many types of information, and this evidence may be utilised to shape the most accurate historical image (Stearns, 1998). University students can learn to explain historical political leaders' remarks, which can be employed to differentiate present political leaders' claims in terms of objectivity or selfishness. In other words, learning how to mix many sorts of evidence, such as public remarks, private documents, metadata, and digital displays, to build the capacity to construct coherent arguments based on disparate facts. Such ability may also be used for facts encountered in daily life.

5.3 The Ability to Evaluate Past Examples of Change

Accessing historical examples of change is critical for understanding changes in the current environment, which may be viewed as a default talent in an ever-changing world. University students familiar with history are more likely to have a profound capacity to analyse and assess the extent and significance of changes (Stearns, 1998). In comparison, this is more plausible since history can compare individual changes to previous precedents and discover the most intense coherence of change. Learning history, for example, can assist in confirming whether one key ingredient (such as invention) created change or, more commonly, if multiple elements interact to cause such change in real life.

6. Objections to the Importance of History

6.1 Objection from Henry Ford

One of the most common criticisms comes from Henry Ford, the forefather of the mass-produced vehicle. His argument sparked a heated debate at the time. When his cover appeared in the Chicago Tribune in 1916, Ford's statement was published as: "History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's dam is the history we made today" (The Chicago Tribune, 1916 cited in Butterfield, 1965, p. 55). Despite the passage of time, Ford's life and impact remain a focal point for managing thinking and solving theoretical challenges in history (Wood & Wood, 2003; Wren, 2005). Mainly, those who are skeptical of history prefer to rely on his proclamation.

According to Swigger (2008), Ford's contentious place in history is accompanied by doubts about his relationship to and comprehension of the past. On the one hand, as far as people are concerned, Ford declared that history is nonsense, prompting some to accuse him of being ignorant in a previous life and viewing history as an enemy. According to Ford's account of history, it meant nothing to people when they went to battle but lasted a week, with airships and other equipment that people used to use, for example, becoming obsolete in a week (Tribune Suit Record, pp. 5728-5732 cited in Butterfield, 1965). Correspondingly, this subjected Ford to historical facts issues, demonstrating the limitations of his schooling and grasp of American history. On the other hand, because he is such an enthusiastic antiquarian, he is regarded as a pivotal figure in the advancement of American history. In the early nineteenth century, Ford began to propose a personal initiative to display the "greatest single collection" of American history in the nineteenth century (Greenleaf, 1964, p. 85). His 'Greenfield Village' (one of his historical achievements) became America's first 'living history' monument as a result of this (Herhold, 2019), and it is still a famous destination nowadays (The Henry Ford, 2019).

6.2 Other Objections

The history is uninteresting and simplistic, according to the second most popular criticism. Even if it is not nonsense, it is still a poor bus fare with terrible facts and dates (Corfield, 2008). Most of the time, such criticism comes from those who do not know enough about the history and are upset about the results of their children's historical tests, where they may be incorrect about specific significant dates. Or perhaps it's due to the untrained instructors that teach history in a dull manner.

7. Dangers that Occurred Due to Lack of Knowledge of History — Examples from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

It is easy to see how Orwell uses Winston Smith, an essential character in this novel, to play the role of rewriting history based on party orders in this book. For example, Julia, Winston's lover, also served as a member of the Ministry of Truth. At the same time, Orwell did not offer much information about her exact position except delineated she was conducting propaganda work for the party. Nonetheless, Orwell expended much effort in defining Winston's work in detail, implying his central argument of this book — the importance of history. In this sense, it is possible to infer that without a thorough grasp of history, people are more likely to be the victims of exploitation at best and enslavement at worst, as demonstrated by the party's slogan, "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell & Brodeur, 2017, p. 146).

"It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen" (Orwell & Brodeur, 2017, p. 1). According to this opening statement, the clocks were striking from here, but instead of one, it was thirteen. In the society presented in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, we can observe how time is viewed or measured. When Winston began writing his journal, he didn't even know if it was 1984 since "it was never possible nowadays to pin down any date within a year or two" (Orwell & Brodeur, 2017, p. 4). Consequently, it is possible to conclude that this is a society in which people have distinct perceptions of time. As per Carr (1961), history starts when humans begin to contemplate the passes of time-based on specific events in which they may actively engage and participate, rather than natural phenomena such as the changing of seasons. Accordingly, time is a huge issue that we need to pay attention to; if time changes or its concept changes, it will have a lot of unanticipated consequences. Here are some concrete examples from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, along with a discussion.

Firstly, as delineated in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, people are more likely to fail to detect accurate information and

preserve not fabricated recollections of impartiality and acquire the truth if they are disconnected from history. Winston struggles to imagine his way back into the dark age of his early infancy after the late 1950s when everything faded. “When there were no external records that you could refer to, even the outline of your own life lost its sharpness. You remembered huge events which had quite probably not happened, you remembered the detail of incidents without being able to recapture their atmosphere, and there were long blank periods to which you could assign nothing” (Orwell & Brodeur, 2017, p. 19). For example, when Big Brother revealed that the allocation of chocolate would be reduced from 30 grams to 20 grams, people marched to protest and express gratitude to Big Brother. The latter increased the quantity of chocolate to 20 grams each week the next day (Orwell & Brodeur, 2017). In this respect, it is exceedingly difficult for people to retain true memories and recognise the right information without historical knowledge.

Secondly, people in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* who did not know history were implanted with the phony and manufactured ‘sanctioned account’, and thus, people lost their capacity to judge. And the truth will be that falsehood entered history and became actuality, misinforming people to some level. According to the ‘sanctioned account,’ Oceania was at war with Eurasia and in partnership with Eastasia in 1984, although Winston knew that it had been just “four years since Oceania had been at war with Eastasia and in alliance with Eurasia” (Orwell & Brodeur, 2017, p. 20). Given that Winston was aware of the reality, he realised it was the erroneous history that contradicted reality. Others who are ignorant of history, on the other hand, will surely believe what official history recounts. Essentially, if all documents told the same account, the falsehood entered history then became fact. Another example I heard was of the Japanese government granting students’ history textbooks that depict a skewed view of history, including erroneous claims to the Dokdo islands (Crowell, 2016). Hence, in such circumstances, people will accept falsified history as fact, and their lack of discernment may have consequences for international relations.

Last but not least, people who did not know history had also lost their memories in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, resulting in a general absence of human nature. Those who lose their memories will gradually deteriorate over time, much as we did when we babbled in ancient times, and that may cause some spiritual damage. When Winston was in a pub, he was attempting to acquire information from an elderly man who, along with “a few others like him were the last links that now existed with the vanished world of capitalism” (Orwell & Brodeur, 2017, p. 50). Regardless, what he wants to know differs from what the older man has to say. Traditionally, the older man should know the reality of that since he was born at that age. Still, with the disappearance of history, he lost his memories as well, proving that historical memory is connected with personal memory in the meanwhile.

Consequently, memory, as demonstrated by psychologists, is unpredictable and uncontrollable. The majority of people can recall specific details from their history, although not always accurately. Memory is like a stone; once formed, it cannot be altered. While, as Mohamed (2011) argues, memory may be moulded as well as selected. People modify their memories to make themselves more appealing and vital as time passes (Macmillan, 2010).

8. Conclusion

To summarise, this paper discusses the reasons why *Nineteen Eighty-Four* should be required reading for every university student based on the following sections, namely the importance of history for university students (including how history can teach university students understand people and societies, teach about change and how our society came to be, and help university students acquire some skills, such as the ability to evaluate competing interpretations, evidencing, and so on); objections to the value of history, notably from Henry Ford, as well as other objections; risks that occurred due to a lack of historical knowledge in light of certain examples from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

In a nutshell, the following are why *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a must-read for every university student. Winston became aware that he and others had been “lifted clean out of the stream of history” (Orwell & Brodeur, 2017, p. 97). And that is the point. We are submerged in the currents of history, regardless of whether we like it or not. To navigate them successfully, we require the sort of navigation aid that only historical knowledge can provide. Undoubtedly, history is essential to us, and university students with mature minds should constantly keep it in mind: if we lose it, we will be in a hazardous situation. As a result, we cannot abandon a formidable weapon to stay up with the current period and establish a hopeful future as we all desire. As such, to avoid becoming carried away, we must immerse ourselves in the flow of history with knowledge since university. The novel’s underlying point is likely to depict what might happen in a society when individuals have no comprehension of or engagement with history. This is why, overall, this book is vital for all university students.

Specifically, because of history, life is more intriguing. It adds fantasy and interest to what may otherwise be a monotonous procedure. More significantly, they connect individuals to a world beyond our own and give us a guidepost that transcends beyond our immediate concerns. They provide us with a sense of harmony and perspective. As Osborne (2006) holds, history supplies us with links, linkages, and points of reference that carry

us beyond our current situation while also allowing us to see it from the outside, as it were. It provides us with a sense of connection and separation at the same time while also assisting us in arming ourselves against those who aim to control us, whether emotionally or physically (Osborne, 2006). Meanwhile, it appears that this should be at the top of every university's priority list.

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