

The Power of a Novel
1st Place Stuckey Contest Winner
Nancy Hulslander
Visitation Academy – St. Louis
St. Louis, MO.

As I roamed the many aisles of Barnes and Noble, I was immediately drawn to the cover of Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World*, which depicted an ominous sketch of a person who was half-man and half-machine. The man's arm and legs were outstretched, but the rest of this body was made of gears and machinery. After coming across this novel and its striking front cover, I decided to do some research. The novel sounded intriguing, but I did not think anything of it at the time. However, a few months later, I was told that *Brave New World*, paired with George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, was one of the options for my senior research paper. I remembered the impact that my encounter with Huxley's novel had on me, and doing more in-depth research into both of these novels, I decided to select them as my two research books.

While reading these novels, I noted the many similarities in how they portray totalitarian governments and the new advancements that allow these governments to maintain such overwhelming power. Although the two governing bodies of these books, "The Party" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and "The World State" in *Brave New World*, may appear to be different on the surface due to differing ideals, both governments use very similar methods of control to enforce their envisioned picture of society. The primary method of control used in both novels is brainwashing, where these oppressive governments aim to control not only the information available to the people, but more importantly, the very constitutions of the people themselves. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Huxley's *Brave New World* were both written to serve as warnings against the dangers of future totalitarian governments, seen through the depictions of these governments as using various forms of brainwashing to manipulate individuals in order to have total control over all aspects of society.

The totalitarian governments in Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* use different brainwashing techniques to manipulate their citizens and turn them into pawns of the governments, giving these ruling parties complete control over society. In *Brave New World*, the World State literally does this through genetic modification. In this dystopian society, children are no longer born, but manufactured by the State. They are genetically altered to have certain characteristics that match their chosen caste group: Alphas, Beta, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons. They condition people to fit willingly into their predestined place within society. Every form of "conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny" (Huxley 16). The World State executes this in a number of ways, from chemical alterations to embryos, behavioral tests on infants, and sleep hypnopedia exercises on all citizens. The World State destroys free will and, through this conditioning, ensures that they will continue to hold total control over society. Nobody is allowed to have their own beliefs and opinions, because the government already determines these. A "child's mind is these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions is the child's mind. And not the child's mind only. The adult's mind too - all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides—made up of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are our suggestions!" (Huxley 29). The World State has brainwashed each individual to hold the beliefs of the State, rather than their own personal beliefs. A person's beliefs and opinions help make up his or her identity as a human being, so when someone takes away another person's ability to form these opinions, he or she takes away an important aspect of humanity from that person. Therefore, the citizens that live under the World State are not really people; they are manufactured robots designed by the State. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston comes to this realization of his own circumstances when he sees a fellow citizen and has "a curious feeling that this was not a real human being but some kind of dummy" (Orwell 56). Like in *Brave New World*, the people controlled by the Party were not supposed to hold any personal opinions that were not given to them by the Party. If they had a single thought that did not align with the

Party's ideals, this was considered to be thought-crime and they would be vaporized. If a person was vaporized, he or she was "considered to never have existed" (Orwell 43). The Party could manipulate individuals to this extent, making it so they had never existed in the first place. The Party did not infuse their beliefs into their citizens through genetic modification, but rather through fear and oppression. In the views of the Party, "Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing" (Orwell 276). The Party manipulated the individual by manipulating the individual's mind, his or her beliefs which had to align with the Party's own ideals. In both Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Huxley's *Brave New World*, the totalitarian governments manipulate the very individual so that they can hold complete power over all of society.

In analyzing the manipulation of individuals at the hands of the governments in both novels, I became particularly interested in the futuristic elements of these societies that allowed these governments to remain in power. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* it was technological progress that allowed for spying and psychological manipulation, and in *Brave New World* it was the advancements in medicine that sparked my curiosity. I was drawn to the idea that the humanity of the people within these novels had vanished as they had become pieces of machinery and pawns of the government. I recognized the presence of this idea in some of our world's current advancements, so I continued my research and began to uncover many modern-day connections that showed how these novels have become more relevant in recent years.

For my research on the modern-day connections to *Brave New World*, I focused my search on medical advancements and breakthroughs that have brought us closer to our own "brave new world." My curiosity only grew as I learned about rapid breakthroughs in genetic research, spurred by the Human Genome Project, as well as advances in molecular biology, new reproductive technologies, and even the cloning of vegetable matter. As for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I researched the increase of technological surveillance through the USA Patriot Act and found that a lot of the far-fetched concepts in Orwell's novel have actually become common-practice in today's society. These elements of our current world reveal that perhaps Orwell and Huxley did not just make senseless predictions. The potential for disaster shown in these novels is real in the sense that we do not know what is possible or how far we can go with certain advancements. These novels were written to serve as warnings against the dangers of totalitarian governments of their time periods, but they also serve as warnings for us today. When people no longer question the government because they do not hold any opinions of their own, this leads to disaster because the government continues to have complete control over society and the freedom to do whatever it pleases. The novels do not serve as warnings against technological and medical advancements, but rather the exploitation of these advancements that can occur when power is not checked.

While reading, analyzing, and researching both novels opened my eyes to the need for caution regarding some of our most recent scientific breakthroughs, *Brave New World* in particular had a significant impact on me as an individual. When I first began reading Huxley's novel, I was simply viewing it as one of my research paper books that I was required to read and might as well try to enjoy. However, I believe that literature can have a deeper impact on people that we give it credit, and this is what *Brave New World* had for me. For as long as I can remember, I have always dreamed of becoming a doctor. I have always had this pull toward medicine, but Huxley's novel truly sparked my intellectual curiosity. While researching the modern-day connections to the book, I often forgot that I was even doing research for a paper in the first place because I was so wrapped up in exploring and learning all new information and different advancements in medicine. I am still amazed by how far we have come in the field of medicine, and Huxley's novel has made me even more curious and passionate about this career choice. As a result of everything that I have learned from these novels and the extraordinary impacts that they have had on me, I am incredibly thankful that I stumbled across the half-man and half-machine drawing on the cover of *Brave New World*.