**IDH 2930: George Orwell’s Political Thought**

M Period 11 (6:15pm-7:05pm)

Hume 119

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Office Hours: By appointment only

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The English writer George Orwell has become a frequent reference point in contemporary political discourse. But, beyond a concern over the effects of propaganda and the status of “truth,” what *were* Orwell’s political views? Did he think fascism posed the same threat as communism, or that Hitler was as dangerous as Stalin? Was he a defender of democracy? Of human rights? How did he reconcile his patriotism with the violence and oppression of British colonialism? Why did he fight in the Spanish Civil War? And if “all art is propaganda,” as Orwell famously wrote, what does that mean about his own literary efforts? This class will explore these and other questions, as well as their contemporary relevance, by surveying a wide range of Orwell’s writings up to and including his 1949 text *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The goals of the course will thus be to 1) track, understand, and critically analyze Orwell’s political concerns in their historical context; 2) determine the extent to which Orwell’s work moves beyond critique and forwards a concrete political ideology; 3) examine the ideological assumptions that motivate *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; and 4) reflect on the extent to which Orwell’s views on politics, propaganda, and truth speak to present-day concerns. Generally, students will be encouraged to take Orwell’s arguments seriously, and to determine their own positions with respect to them.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**

Grades will be determined by the following (100 pts total).

1. Class participation (30 pts)

The class is discussion-based. That means you need to A) do the readings before class; B) attend class; and C) participate in class discussions. Repeated failure to do any one of these will have a noticeable impact on your participation grade. **Tardiness will be forgiven only once**; thereafter, it too will impact your participation grade.

1. Reading Summaries (25 pts)

Starting on **January 14** and ending on **March 11**, you will have weekly opportunities to submit reading summaries on Canvas (see the “Discussion” page). You are required to submit five summaries total (5 pts each), but you may submit up to seven for extra credit (2 pts each). These summaries are due each Monday at 3pm. I expect the following two components: first, a 4-7 sentence analysis of an interesting or controversial idea in the assigned reading (include page numbers and, where appropriate, direct quotes); and second, a 1-2 sentence open-ended discussion question that relates to the passage or idea you have analyzed. I take these length requirements seriously and will deduct points if they are not followed. **Late submissions will not be accepted.**

1. Presentation (15 pts)

You will be responsible for giving one 5-7 minute in-class presentation, focused on the readings for the week you are assigned. The presentation should critically analyze the readings and build toward one or two discussion questions. Discussion questions must be open-ended and must follow logically from your presentation. **You will email your discussion question to me for approval by 3pm on the Monday you present.**

1. Essay (30 pts)

You will submit one 1,000 to 1,200-word essay on a topic of your choosing, due May 3 at noon via Canvas submission. Details TBA.

**Academic Integrity**

All students will be held to the University of Florida Honor Code. Cheating of any kind is unacceptable, and so is plagiarism (portraying other people’s words and ideas as your own). I will use Turnitin for all Canvas submissions.

**Accommodations**

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations must first register with the Dean of Student’s Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who will then need to provide this documentation to me (the Instructor). Please talk to me as soon as possible if there is any issue in this regard.

**Required Texts**

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961).

**Recommended Texts**

George Orwell, *All Art is Propaganda: Critical Essays* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2009).

George Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts: Narrative Essays* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2009).

\*Apart from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, links for all readings will be posted on Canvas.

**Schedule**

**January 7**

Introduction; Sign-Up for Presentations

**January 14**: Colonialism

“A Hanging” (1931)

“Shooting an Elephant” (1936)

“Marrakech” (1939)

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Reading Summary #1 Due*

**January 28:** Patriotism

“England Your England” (1941) (Part One of *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*)

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Reading Summary #2 Due*

**February 4:** The Spanish Civil War

*Homage to Catalonia*, Chapter 1 (1938)

“Spilling the Spanish Beans” (1937)

“Looking Back on the Spanish War” (1943)

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Reading Summary #3 Due*

**February 11**: Facing Fascism

Review of *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler (1940)

“Shopkeepers at War” and “The English Revolution” (1941) (Parts Two and Three of *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*)

Presenter 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Presenter 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Reading Summary #4 Due*

**February 18**: Justifying Violence

“No, Not One” (1941)

“Revenge is Sour” (1945)

“Notes on Nationalism” (1945)

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Reading Summary #5 Due*

**February 25**: Thought Control I

Introduction to *Animal Farm* (1945)

“The Prevention of Literature” (1946)

“Why I Write” (1946)

Presenter 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Presenter 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Reading Summary #6 Due*

**March 11:** Thought Control II

“Propaganda and Demotic Speech” (1944)

“Politics and the English Language” (1945)

“Writers and the Leviathan” (1948)

Presenter 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Presenter 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Reading Summary #7 Due*

**March 18**

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* Part One (pp. 1-48).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**March 25**

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* Part One (pp. 48-104).

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**April 1**

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* Part Two (pp. 105-159).

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**April 8**

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* Part Two (pp. 159-224).

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**April 15**

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* Part Three (pp. 225-298).

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**April 22**

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* Appendix: The Principles of Newspeak (pp. 299-312).

**Optional Readings**

Burgess, Anthony. “Intentions,” “Clockwork Oranges,” “The Death of Love.” In *1985*. London: Hutchinson, 1978.

Fromm, Erich. “Afterword.” In George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New York: Signet Classic, 1961.

Hitchens, Christopher. *Why Orwell Matters*. Basic Books, 2003.

Kateb, George. “The Road to 1984.” *Political Science Quarterly* 81 (1966): 564-580.

Rorty, Richard. “The Last Intellectual in Europe: Orwell on Cruelty.” In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Shklar, Judith N. “Nineteen Eighty-Four: Should Political Theory Care?” *Political Theory* 13 (1985): 5-18.

Walzer, Michael. “George Orwell’s England.” In *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

1. *Note: the page number assignments are meant to help pace your reading of the book rather than tell you exactly what you must read by each meeting. Simply try your best to keep up – it’ll make your life easier and you’ll be better able to participate meaningfully in discussions if you do.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)