

BHP 213 Text and Context: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
Spring 2009 Prof. Pamela Brown and Arlene Wilner
Thursday evening, 6:30-9:30

Contemporary discussions of politics, journalism, and social issues regularly reflect the influence of George Orwell's classic novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Expressions like "Big Brother is Watching" and the term "Orwellian" routinely appear in modern speech and writings. Published in 1949, the book reflects the turbulent world in which Orwell participated from the waning of British colonialism to the rise of the Cold War. This course will explore the historical and cultural context that shaped Orwell as well as the ways in which Orwell's writings have been used and continue to be used by politicians, commentators and others.

Required Texts; *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell (Signet)
 Animal Farm by George Orwell (Signet)
 Burmese Days by George Orwell (Harcourt)
 A Collection of Essays by George Orwell (Harcourt)
 Various handouts and Blackboard links

Grading:	Article report and analysis	20 percent
	Class discussion, quizzes	25 percent
	Study questions	30 percent
	Final synthesis essay (take-home)	25 percent

Policies: All work must be submitted in hard copy form unless otherwise indicated. Work must be typed, double-spaced and multiple pages must be stapled. Always keep a hard copy of any assignment you submit.

Discussion is a key component of this course. Therefore, students are expected to be present at all class meetings and activities. Absences will be grounds for reduction of your final grade.

Weekly schedule:

1/29 **Introduction to course and the Historical Context for studying George Orwell**

For tonight: Read "A Hanging"(1931) (online), and in *Collection*: "Shooting an Elephant" (1946), "Marrakech" (1939) and "Why I Write" (1946).

Homework: For 2/5, read "Such, Such Were the Joys" in *Collection*; and excerpts from *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *Wigan Pier* (1937).

Begin reading *Burmese Days* (1934); must be completed by 2/12.

- 2/5 **Early Influences: Orwell as both insider and outsider**
 Discuss “Such, Such”; *Down and Out* and *Wigan Pier*.
Reports: 1) Orwell, “Reflections on Gandhi” (1949), in *Collection*
 2) Beadle, “George Orwell’s Literary Studies of Poverty in
 England” (1978)
 Homework: For 2/12, complete reading *Burmese Days*.
 Answer *Burmese Days* study questions, to be handed in on 2/12.
- 2/12 **White man’s burden—the mask of the imperialist**
 Discuss *Burmese Days*.
Burmese Days study questions due.
Reports: 1) Kerr, “Colonial Habitats, “Orwell and Woolf in the
 Jungle” (1997)
 2) Meyers, “The Ethics of Responsibility: Orwell’s
 Burmese Days” 1968
 Homework: For 2/19, read selections from *Homage to Catalonia* (pp. 1-4;
 chapter 5) distributed in class; and read in *Collection* “Looking Back on
 the Spanish Civil War.”
 Complete study questions.
- 2/19 **Fighting for a Just Cause**
 Discuss “Homage” selections and “Looking Back” in class.
Reports: 1) Francis Fitzgerald, “Stellar Spin” (2007), fr. *What
 Orwell Didn’t Know*
 2) Neier, “Freedom, Liberty, and Rights: Three Cautionary
 Tales” (2007) fr. *What Orwell Didn’t Know*
 Homework: For 2/22, read Gornick essay; and in *Collection* pp. 234-252
 (selection from “Inside the Whale”).
 Answer study questions on Communism, due 2/26.
- 2/26 **Communism: Allure and Backlash in the United States**
 Discuss Gornick, study questions, and excerpt from “Inside the Whale”
Reports: 1) Orwell, “The English Revolution” (Part III of *The Lion
 and the Unicorn*)
 2) Fleay and Sanders, “Looking into the Abyss: George
 Orwell at the BBC” (1989)
 Homework: for 3/5 Read *Animal Farm*
 Answer Study Questions on *Animal Farm*, due 3/5.
- 3/5 **Are Men Pigs?**
 Discuss *Animal Farm* and study questions
 Study Questions on *Animal Farm* due.
 Report: V. C. Letemendia, “Revolution on Animal Farm: Orwell’s
 Neglected Commentary” (1992)

Homework: For 3/12 read essay by Tony Shaw , 'Some Writers are More Equal than Others': George Orwell, the State and Cold War Privilege" (distributed in class)

3/12

The (Ab)uses of a fable: legacies of Animal Farm

Continue discussion of *Animal Farm*, including Shaw essay, and view film versions.

Reports: 1) Orwell, selections from "As I Please"
2) Orwell, "Raffles and Miss Blandish," in *Collection*

Homework: [Note: Class will not meet again until 4/2 due to spring break and professors' conference.] For 4/2 read "Politics and the English Language" in *Collection*, Orwell "New Words" (handout) and the following essays (hand-outs from *What Orwell Didn't Know*): Lakoff, "What Orwell Didn't Know About the Brain, the Mind, and Language" (2007), and Cowan, "Reporters and Rhetoric" (2007)

Begin reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; must be completed by 4/9.

3/15-3/22

Spring Break

3/26

NO CLASS MEETING—professors are presenting a conference paper
Continue reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and answer study questions as assigned

4/2

"Good prose is like a windowpane"

Discuss "Politics and the English Language" plus essays by Lakoff and Cowan

Reports : 1)Prose, "Sloppiness and the English Language," and Williams, "An Egregious Collocation of Vocables" (both from *What Orwell Didn't Know* (2007) :

2) Lemann, "The Limits of Power" from *What Orwell Didn't Know* (2007) and Menand, "Honest, Decent, Wrong: The Invention of George Orwell" (2003)

Begin discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Homework: For 4/9 complete reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.
Complete Study Questions on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, due 4/9.

4/9

Warning or Prediction?: A Dystopia for Orwell's Time—and Ours

Discuss *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Study Questions on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* due.

Reports: 1) Hitchens, "Orwell and the Left," chp. 2 from *Why Orwell Matters* (2002)

2) Hitchens, "Orwell and the Left," chp. 3 from *WOM*

Homework: For 4/16, read essays distributed in class.

OR

1) Zimbardo, "Mind Control in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four" from *On Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and our Future*

2) Nussbaum, "The Death of Pity: Orwell and American Political Life"

Assignment for final paper distributed

4/16

"You and the Atom Bomb"

Discuss *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and assigned essays.

Report: 1) Danner, "Words in a Time of War: On Rhetoric, Truth, and Power" from *What Orwell Didn't Know*

View film, "Dr. Strangelove," dir. Kubrick (1964)

Homework: Read Orwell, "You and the Atom Bomb"

Write response to study question(s) on Orwell and "Strangelove" as assigned.

4/23

"Duck and cover"

Discuss "Dr. Strangelove"

View "The Atomic Café"

Report: "Orwell's List" (2003)

For 4/30, read Kaplan, "Welcome to the Infotainment Freak Show," and Navasky, "Neither Snow, Nor Rain. . .," both from *What Orwell Didn't Know*

4/30

"Tits, twits, and tornadoes"

Discuss essays by Kaplan and Navasky

Reports: 1) Beadle, "George Orwell and the Victorian Radical Tradition" (1976)

2) West, "Sex, Law, Power and the Community (2005)

Summary and synthesis

Final Synthesis Paper accepted through Wednesday, May 6, 3pm.

