

ORWELL IN PEACE AND WAR  
Midcoast Senior College  
Tuesdays 9.30-11 am, Autumn 2022  
Via ZOOM

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Despite the brevity of his life, George Orwell (1903-1950) became one of the most prolific writers of the twentieth century. Many, many titles in fiction, investigative reporting, autobiography, essays and many hundreds of book reviews were part of his writer's portfolio. Adept in the arts of polemic – a form practiced more in Britain than in the US– Orwell did battle in all of his *genres* with the enemies of democratic socialism, especially fascism.

He was also an English patriot who often saw what he called “decency” in the behavior of English men and women. Opponents to his extreme Left and Right often drew his fire, to their regret.

In this course we will read about and discuss Orwell's account of poverty during the Great Depression and his autobiography of service as a volunteer fighter during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. Then we will go on to the development of his views during World War II, especially his writing about the Soviet Union leading up to his well-known fable, Animal Farm.

During the last 30-40 minutes of our meetings I will shift the focus from Orwell in Britain to Orwell and Orwell's writing, and the current state of American politics.

Three short books are assigned. Additional essays are recommended. See the page following entitled ORWELL READINGS and the SYLLABUS below.

Meetings and topics

1. **September 13.** The life of Eric A. Blair, who adopted the pen name George Orwell.

DISCUSSION: How would Orwell diagnose and what would he prescribe for American politics today? For this meeting or early in the course read “Politics and the English Language.”

2. **September 20.** Orwell and poverty. The great depression in Britain; Orwell's perspectives. Read approx. half of The Road to Wigan Pier.

DISCUSSION: How would you define social and economic class in the U.S. today? Is class a useful prism for understanding U.S. politics?

3. **September 27.** Orwell, Keynes, and the great depression in Britain and America. Read the second half of Wigan Pier.

DISCUSSION: What brought the great depression to an end? War time production? Keynesian economics?

4. **October 4.** The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. Orwell as volunteer fighter. Read the first half of Homage to Catalonia.

DISCUSSION: TBA.

5. **October 11.** Orwell in Spain; his and his wife's escape from Spain. Read the second half of Catalonia.

DISCUSSION: Is the mention of civil war in American journalism alarmist and a rhetorical excess, or a real possibility?

6. **October 18.** Orwell in the Second World War. At the BBC. Optional reading: Orwell's essay of early 1941, "The Lion and the Unicorn."

DISCUSSION: TBA

7. **October 25.** The road to Animal Farm. Orwell's views on the USSR. Orwell and the Cold War. Read Animal Farm.

DISCUSSION: TBA.

8. **November 1.** Loose Ends and Conclusions.

DISCUSSION: What American political writers of past or present are closest to Orwell in temperament and method of analysis? Do we now live in a "post truth" society?

(syllabus as of 15 August 22)