

UNIT 4

Homework Assignment: 3-title book selection list for Research Essay, with required survey answers

*This assignment is worth **40 homework points** (the equivalent of 4 discussion forums or Journal writes) and is due by **11:55 pm Wednesday, March 26**.*

Unit 4, the upcoming final section of the course that starts right after you return from Spring Break, will be very much like the current and previous units in terms of its focus once again on thesis-driven, close textual examinations of a given set of readings and how well or not well they're written. And then, because each unit builds on the previous one (as you've seen already), Unit 4 will add in one additional component or skill set: academic research, which you'll be asked to do on your own with guidance from me. You'll get specific instruction in current library research techniques during the unit to help you approach the required research component so as to effectively integrate what you find through that research into your essay work. For the final essay (due at the end of the term), you'll be asked to find and use a minimum of 5 secondary sources in your essay, sources that will help you talk about and analyze your primary text.

Again, we'll have time later on to learn more about the essay assignment and its research requirements during the unit. However, you can preview the formal Research Essay Assignment Description now if you like by looking in one of these three places, depending on which class you're in: for my online students, in the Essays folder and/or directly beneath this homework assignment link where I've temporarily placed it until the unit opens; or for my face-to-face students, in the Research Essay resources area in the middle column of our course page at GregTeach.net.

But before we move to a discussion of research practices and requirements, we need a primary text to read and study. In past semesters I have assigned the same text for everyone to read and write about for this final essay assignment. The text I choose is a single author, book length work of nonfiction for those classes, and students are asked to purchase that title along with *Rereading America* at the beginning of the term as part of their required book purchases for the course.

This semester, I'm trying something new: allowing **you each to choose your own book to read and write about**, which you'll then need to check out, rent or buy on your own within the next few weeks. These are the basic parameters for your final book choices:

- It can be a book you already own, or one you check out from the library, or rent or purchase from a bookseller, online or off.
- It can be a physical book or a digital e-reader version.
- It can be something you've read before or even written about for another class, or it can be something brand new to you (which I recommend).
- It can be old or new, classic or more obscure.
- It should be something you're actually interested in reading in real life, because you're interested in the writing as well as what the book is about.
- It **must** be **nonfiction**, which is defined as "prose writing that is based on facts, real events and real people"
- It can be *any* of the following types of nonfiction writing: personal memoir; biography or autobiography; investigative journalism; instructional writing; narrative essay (book length); philosophical or spiritual or historical texts; journals or diaries; travel books.
- It must **not** be any type of **fiction**, which is defined as "literature in the form of prose, especially short stories and novels, that describes imaginary events and people" – things like mysteries, romance novels, science fiction, fantasy, crime thrillers, etc.
- **It must be nonfiction, it must be written by a single author, and it must be a minimum of 100 pages in length.**

Though you could just go to a new or used bookstore and browse the nonfiction shelves for intriguing works you'd like to read (which I recommend), you may also refer to the linked list below: through a very quick Google search, I found this list which has a number of excellent possibilities for you to choose from. Virtually any of these would be acceptable titles for the assignment, and most can be readily found at very low cost from area booksellers (new and used), online vendors, and in local libraries because they're almost all "classic" or accepted "great works" of nonfiction:

http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/12719.Time_Magazine_s_All_TIME_100_Best_Non_Fiction_Books

* * *

I have to be able to screen your book choices and help you select the best one though, as some books will be more readily able to be used as fruitful material for a sustained and close textual examination than others will. I need to be part of that decision making process to help you make the best selection – one that fits your needs for a good read but also one that fits my needs for appropriate assignment material.

So, you have a short homework assignment that is **due the Wednesday before Spring Break**, no later.

Choose a minimum of 3 possible book-length works of *nonfiction* (not fiction) you're interested in reading and writing about, and tell me a little about each one so that I may help you choose the best one to use as your sole primary text for your research work to begin after Spring Break. You're choosing 3 possible titles rather than just one to give me, and you, some options. I may want you to use one of the given titles, but not the others – this will in large part depend on how well you convince me that book A, B, or C is the best choice and the one you'd most *like* to use for your research work. Once you choose your title, you'll have all of Spring Break and the two weeks after Spring Break as well to read your book – there will not be any class activities during the break, and all activities for the two weeks after the break will be related to textual analysis skills and research practices, but not your chosen text itself, so 3 weeks should be more than enough time to get your book read.

When you forward your list to me for this homework assignment, which I will respond to with my suggestions by the Friday before Spring Break, you are required to supply this **survey information and answer the following questions** for *each* of your 3 required possible titles:

1. What's the title, who is the author, when was it first published?
2. What type of writing is it, and what's it about?
3. What do you find interesting or unique about the writing (not the ideas) that will allow you to build a 6-8 page essay of close textual analysis around?

Again, remember that each of your selections must be written by a **single author**, they must be **nonfiction**, and they must be a minimum of **100 pages** long. Once you and I have decided on your final title (and by submitting your top 3 choices to me, ranked in order of preference, you're telling me that *any* of the three would be acceptable to you), you'll be committed to that book for the duration of the unit and tasked with critically evaluating its writing in your final research essay.

Keep in mind that I'll want you to choose a book whose topics you're interested in but more importantly has interesting writing that you can observe, learn from and critique. Keep in mind too that for the research component, you'll need to go out and find other sources that are writing about the same topics as in your primary source, but in *different* ways. Let's say you choose a version of the Bible as your primary text. For your research work, I'll want you to go find some critical essays about how well or not well the Bible is written, and I'll want you find other religious texts like the Talmud or Buddhist prayer books to compare it against, and I'll want you find other texts that are also telling a story about resurrection or redemption but in very different ways, etc. So you'll want to choose a primary work to read that you're comfortable examining from multiple different literary angles using an array of other works – some of which will look nothing like your primary text and some of which will likely be critical of how your primary text is written.

That's the reading list assignment. Spend the next two and a half weeks deciding what you'd like to read, and forward that 3-book final list to me, with the above 3 question sets fully addressed for each selection.