

Essay 2: Critical Analysis

Choose one of the following four options.

Option 1. Identify a theme in any of the Native texts on our syllabus: for example, the role of women, the relationship between human beings and animals, the creation of the earth, attitudes toward death, attitudes toward the land, or some other theme. Then find a Euro-American text from our reading schedule that addresses the same theme. Keeping your attention focused on this theme and the elements of form or style related to this theme, compare the two texts. In what ways are they importantly similar? How do they differ from each other? In what ways are those differences significant?

Option 2. Would it be useful or meaningful to consider Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's narrative (or some other personal narrative on our syllabus) a "spiritual autobiography"? This paper topic will require that you define what you mean by "spiritual autobiography." Don't be afraid to do a little research or to use someone else's definition; just give other scholars and critics credit where credit is due by documenting your use of other sources. This paper topic will also require that you defend your answer with careful, specific analysis of Cabeza de Vaca's text.

Option 3. Imagine that you have been invited to give a short lecture to the students in HIST 251, History of the United States to 1877. The topic of your lecture is "Understanding Puritan Theology through Puritan Literature." Explain to these students in as clear and straightforward manner as possible the salient features of Puritan theology as they appear in literary texts of the era (in particular, the texts on our syllabus). You will probably want to use secondary sources to help you secure your own grasp on the main points of Puritan religious thought; but (again) give other scholars and critics credit where credit is due by documenting your use of other sources. Try to use primary sources whenever possible to illustrate your main ideas. And remember: many of these students may be either bored or confused by Puritan religion. Try to make it meaningful, exciting, or important to them.

Option 4. Compare Cabeza de Vaca's narrative to Mary Rowlandson's account of her captivity among Algonkian Indians. To get at differences between the two, you might try to describe the narrators' attitudes toward Native peoples and the kinds of language used to convey those attitudes. You might also think about how cultural differences like gender, religion, ethnicity, and region play in the constitution of a self. For example, in what ways (if any) is Rowlandson's response to captivity different because she's a woman? In what ways (if any) does Cabeza de Vaca's Catholicism shape his perspective of Native peoples?

Due Date. Thursday, **February 22.**

Length. About 5 typed, double-spaced pages.

Revisions. After I return your papers (on March 1 probably), please read my comments. If at that point, you would like to revise your paper, please do so. Revisions will be due one week after papers have been returned (March 8). You will also have the opportunity to revise your second major essay. A revision must be substantially improved to merit a grade change. To submit a revision, please write a one-paragraph summary explaining why and how you revised and hand it in with both the revised version and the old version with my comments.

Alternative Paper Assignment

Assignment. You will have the option in this class to write one long paper (the alternative paper assignment) in lieu of the final two separate shorter papers. In this longer alternative paper, you would formulate and introduce a critical problem (and this means positioning your formulation with respect to previous criticism), take a position that engages the problem, and support its ideas with well-chosen evidence and careful reasoning. The paper should be 15 to 20 pages long and include a works cited list.

The specific topic will be yours to select and develop. The course should guide and inspire this selection, and I am happy to meet with you to suggest possible directions and potential sources. Ideally, your personal interests, the reading, the classroom discussions, and your outside research will all contribute to the development of your paper topic. The exact topic of the paper is yours to decide, though there is an expectation that your paper will examine in some significant way the texts on our reading schedule.

Conferences. If you want to try the alternative paper assignment, you must meet with me for a brief paper or brainstorming conference on or before Wednesday, **February 21**.

Proposals On Tuesday, **April 10**, you will hand in a written, one-page paper proposal. The proposal should be clear and specific, though I realize that some papers will change their exact approach or focus between the time of the proposal and the day the final paper is due

Due Date. Thursday, **April 26**

Length. 15-20 typed, double-spaced pages

Revisions. After I return your papers (on May 3 probably), please read my comments. If at that point, you would like to revise your paper, please do so. Revisions will be due one week after papers have been returned (roughly, anytime during finals week).. A revision must be substantially improved to merit a grade change. To submit a revision, please write a one-paragraph summary explaining why and how you revised and hand it in with both the revised version and the old version with my comments.

About Paper 2 or the Alternative Paper Assignment. If you have questions or concerns about your paper or you just want someone to bounce some ideas off of, please drop by the office to talk with me. I enjoy talking with students about their work, so please don't hesitate to meet with me. I'll be in my office during my office hours (Tue 1:30-2:30, Wed 10:30-11:30, Thu 10:00-11:00). If those times don't fit with your schedule, I would be happy to set up some other time to meet with you.

