AP US History SUMMER ASSIGNMENT FOR 2015-2016: This Republic of Suffering

This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War, by Drew Gilpin Faust
Publisher: Vintage Books (Random House, Inc.)
ISBN: 978-0375703836

Bring the book and the completed assignments with you to the first class meeting. Enrollment in AP US History is contingent on successful completion of all parts of this assignment by the first day of class.

About the book: More than 600,000 soldiers lost their lives in the American Civil War. An equivalent proportion of today's population would be six million. In This Republic of Suffering, Drew Gilpin Faust reveals the ways that death on such a scale changed not only individual lives but the life of the nation, describing how the survivors managed on a practical level and how a deeply religious culture struggled to reconcile the unprecedented carnage with its belief in a benevolent God. Throughout, the voices of soldiers and their families, of statesmen, generals, preachers, poets, surgeons, nurses, northerners and southerners come together to give us a vivid understanding of the Civil War's most fundamental and widely shared reality. This Republic of Suffering is a National Bestseller and Faust is the President of Harvard University.

ASSIGNMENT:

1) READING: Read the book. It is recommended that you complete your summer reading and assignment, two to three weeks before the first week of school so the reading will be fresh.

2) READING QUESTIONS: Complete the attached reading questions. You may use both the book and outside sources to help you complete these questions.

3) CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW: Students will write and 3 to 4 page critical book review using MLA formatting (Times New Roman, 12 point type, Works Cited Page, double spaced, 1 inch margins all around). See below for more information concerning the critical book review.

4) QUIZ: A reading quiz over the book will be given on the first Friday of the school year. The quiz questions will be based on the reading questions.
5) BONUS: Take a picture of yourself reading the book this summer (such as by the pool, at the beach, in a tree) and email the picture to me at jwilcox@bishopmiege.com. I will be putting together a slide show with the pictures for the first week of school.

READING QUESTIONS:
1) How did the death toll of the Civil War – an estimated 620,000 soldiers and 50,000 civilians and perhaps even more, according to a new estimate – change us as a nation?
2) How was the government itself transformed by its new responsibility to take care of soldiers who lived and those who died?
3) What did the loss of these lives mean to the nation's understanding of itself?
4) How did this book change your own perception of the Civil War?
5) How did people of that time get through the pain and agony of loss?
6) What sort of emotional scars would linger?

Critical Book Review Information: A book review is not the same thing as a book report, which simply summarizes the content of a book. When writing a book review, you not only report on the content of the book but also assess its strengths and weaknesses. Students sometimes feel unqualified to write a book review; after all, the author of the book is a professional historian. However, even if you cannot write from the same level of experience and knowledge as the author, you can write an effective review if you understand what the assignment requires. In writing a review you do not just relate whether or not you liked the book; you also tell your readers why you liked or disliked it. It is not enough to say, "This book is interesting"; you need to explain why it is interesting. Similarly, it is not enough to report that you disliked a book; you must explain your reaction. Did you find the book unconvincing because the author did not supply enough evidence to support his or her assertions? Or did you disagree with the book's underlying assumptions?

To understand your own reaction to the book, you need to read it carefully and critically.

As a critical reader, you are not passive; you should ask questions of the book and note reactions as you read. Your book review then discusses those questions and reactions. Though there is no "correct" way to structure a review, the following is one possible approach.

• Summarize the book and relate the author's main point, or thesis. (Somewhere early in the paper, identify the author briefly.) [One paragraph]

• Describe the author's viewpoint and purpose for writing; note any aspects of the author's background that are important for understanding the book. [One paragraph]

• Note the most important evidence the author presents to support his or her thesis. [One or two paragraphs]

• Evaluate the author's use of evidence, and describe how he or she deals with counter evidence. [One paragraph]
• Is the book's argument convincing? If so why, if not, why not. Cite examples from the text. [One paragraph]

• Compare this book with other books or articles you have read on the same subject. [One paragraph]

• Conclude with a final evaluation of the book. You might discuss who would find this book useful and why. [One paragraph]

NOTE: "Critical" does not mean negative; skeptical does not mean cynical. If a book is well written and presents an original thesis supported by convincing evidence, say so. A good book review does not have to be negative; it does have to be fair and analytical.