ENGL 3913; take-home midterm

Due: Tuesday 3/9, at 6:30, via e-mail to alexp@unt.edu. Class does not meet on that day.

Format: Attached files in Word or WordPerfect, w/filenames based on this model: <Simon_3913.doc>, for Word, or <Garfunkel_3913.wpd>, for WordPerfect. All essays should be set in TNR, 12-point, single spaced.

Works: Baraka, Dutchman; Wilson, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom
Brecht, Mother Courage and Her Children; The Resistible Rise of Artruro Ui
Churchill, Light Shining in Buckinghamshire; Far Away
Valdez, Actos; Zoot Suit; I Don’t Have to Show You No Stinking Badges!
Wilson, Two Trains Running

Respond to one of the items recorded below. All responses must be based on textual evidence, i.e., supported with specific references (quotations, paraphrases, or allusions) to the texts. Don’t worry about documentation; I know these works well enough to navigate without the guidance. P

Please review my policy on plagiarism (see syllabus).

Length is up to you, but you should know that in response to particularly long or short essays, I ask myself one of the following questions: 1) is this really short essay sufficiently well developed to constitute a meaningful response to the topic?; and 2) is this really long essay an exercise in windbaggery? Is it directionless and poorly edited? A “yes” to any or these questions means Bad News for Yews. Probably 2–4 pages single-spaced, or 4–8 pages double-spaced, constitute useful parameters.

I am not “looking” for any particular answer or answers. Indeed, I have no particular answers in mind. I don’t need to agree or to disagree with your claims; I do need to know that you have presented and defended them responsibly. To extrapolate from and to expand on a statement above: I want smart essays based on solid textual evidence, and I want to see evidence of hard work and determined thought. The topics are baggy by design: they are meant to be starting places, not roadmaps. They “contain multitudes.”

The best essays will have clearly stated theses and will be organized as a series of rhetorically focused supports for these theses.

1. In one way of another, each of these plays constitutes an act of social or political criticism—activism, perhaps. Working with ONE play, identify the object (institution, idea, belief, practice, &c.) of its criticism, then state and defend a claim about how and to what end the playwright develops his or her criticism.

2. In drama, stage directions, scenery, and lighting are essential to the development of meaning. Select ONE play, then state and defend a claim about how the playwright works with stage directions, physical setting, props, OR lighting in that play to promote meaning. (Identify a specific meaning, of course, and specific stage directions or specific instructions on physical setting, props, or lighting).

Some excellent advice: Resist cliché. Write clearly, not elaborately. Draft repeatedly. Edit carefully. Proofread minutely. Teach me something. And GET TO WORK!

GOOD LUCK! (Thomas Jefferson, paraphrased: “I am a big believer in luck. I find that the harder I work the more of it I get.”)