

Critical Book Review Assignment

Arthur Brooks', *The Battle* America's Future (IA463)



Hard copy due (unless cleared stated otherwise) on Friday, December 17th by NOON in my office (Moench A209).

ASSIGNMENT: Write a 5-10 page (no more) critique of the Brooks book. Your paper should be typed, double-spaced, include a cover page, and be stapled. Your paper should be divided into the following parts:

INTRODUCTION: This paper (indeed, *all* papers) should have an introductory paragraph which previews what the paper is about and where you are going with your arguments (i.e., a ‘teaser’ of your assessment of the book).

SUMMARY: Your goal here is to summarize the basic arguments of the book as a whole. There are 100+ pages here and you have to distill this work down to its *key* arguments, describe what sorts of evidence is used to support these propositions, and what is (are) his main conclusion(s) (e.g., note the subtitle). ***The summary should take up no more than half of your paper.*** (NOTE: Even though I am reading your critique, write your summary as if ‘the reader’ has never read the book.)

CRITIQUE: To ‘critique’ is to closely examine the arguments, logic, and evidence that the author presents. The idea here is not *per se* to tear the book apart, but to examine its arguments with a critical eye, articulating both its weak points and its strong points. A valid critique can be either glowingly positive, completely negative, or something in between. It is certainly valid to focus on questions of style and presentation, but you should keep your primary focus on the substance of the arguments and their application to current policy issues. Outside sources can be used to reinforce your arguments. These are not required unless, however, they are necessary to support the argument they are making. For example, if Brooks says the majority of Americans support a certain policy and you do not think that is correct, you cannot just assert that it is not so. You need to cite evidence, such as an opinion survey, to back up your claim.

CONCLUSION: What is your overall assessment of the book and why? The question here is not whether you ‘liked’ the book *per se*. It is whether Brooks made an intelligent, well-supported, and analytically useful argument. You might want to think of it as. “Do I have a better understanding of the key challenges of American politics and society having read this book?”