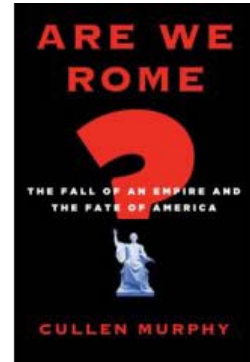


Critical Book Review Assignment

Cullen Murphy's *Are We Rome?* America's Future (VA 366)



Due on **Monday, September 24th** at the start of class.

ASSIGNMENT: Write a 5-10 page (no more) critique of the Murphy 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 200+ pages here and you have to distill this work down to its *key* arguments (in this case, his 'six parallels'), what sorts of arguments or evidence does he use to support his propositions (obviously, he's making historical comparisons), 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.

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 Murphy made an intelligent, well-supported, and analytically useful argument. You might want to think of it as. "Do I have a better understanding of America's role the world – both present and future -- having read this book?"

I have copied one of my own book reviews on the back as an example of how all of this comes together. This should be treated as illustrative, however, not as a formula or model for you to copy for your own project.