**Socratic Seminar: The Fall of Rome & the United States**
*(100 points essays/projects)*

The topic: For this Socratic seminar, you will be reading about and discussing some of the reasons for the rise and fall of empires. This will be accomplished through using the information gained from reading the documents/excerpts provided (primary & secondary sources), as well as any prior knowledge you have on the topic (from our textbook readings). The Socratic seminar will allow for you to explore some of the causes for the fall of the Roman Empire and the potential relevance these events may have for the United States today (as the United States is often compared to the Roman Empire by academics and politicians alike).

The questions: After reading the documents provided, consider the following questions--as the questions listed will be the basis for our Socratic Seminar.

1. What are believed to be the predominant causes (internal & external) for the downfall of the Roman Empire? To what extent did the history of the Roman Empire follow/support the theory of life-cycles/stages of civilizations/empires (proposed by Spengler)?

2. What are the similarities and differences between the Roman Empire and the United States? According to your understanding of the Roman Empire, are both entities more similar or different to one another? Explain.
   - a. If it is determined to be more similar, then is the United States destined to “fall” as the Roman Empire did? Why or why not?

The texts: Attached you will find 4 documents (3 secondary sources and 1 primary source) containing information and theories on the reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire. You will be given time to read the documents independently and prepare for the Socratic seminar. You will need to annotate each document and/or highlight in the documents (as you will be expected to reference them during the discussion); THIS INFORMATION WILL NEED TO BE USED WHEN CREATING THE OUTLINE FOR THE SOCRATIC SEMINAR.

Socratic Seminar: In a Socratic seminar, the participants determine the quality of discussion through making insightful comments and asking questions. The discussion will only be as interesting as you make it! The following is a list of expectations for the discussion:

1. Refer to the text when asking questions and making comments.
2. Discuss your ideas with each other, NOT me.
3. Listen respectfully and take turns speaking.
4. Stick to the point being discussed.

Timeline:
- Wednesday, January 13 (Introduction to Socratic Seminar/Work Day)
- Thursday, January 14 (Work Day)
- Friday, January 15 (Work Day)
- Monday, January 18 (No School; MLK Day)
- Tuesday, January 19 (FINAL IN-CLASS WORK DAY; ROUGH DRAFT OF OUTLINE DUE [20 points spot check; classwork/homework])
- Wednesday, January 20 (Socratic Seminar; Day 1)
- Thursday, January 21 (Socratic Seminar; Day 2)
Required Actions For Preparing for a Socratic Seminar:

• Develop an outline that contains all of the following information:
  o Need to develop your opinion/position in response to the prompt(s)/question(s) based on specific evidence from the documents/research provided and our class lectures and readings (primary source documents and textbook).
    ▪ Share your opinion/position using specific evidence from the documents/research provided and our class lectures and readings (need to be able to cite information to support your opinion/position).
  o Question/Refute the opinions/positions of your classmates using specific evidence from the documents/research provided and our class lectures and readings (need to be able to cite information from the lectures and readings to support any refutation).
  o ROUGH DRAFT NEEDS TO BE COMPLETED BY TUESDAY, JANUARY 19 AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PERIOD (20 points; classwork/homework).
• Listen to the opinions/positions of your classmates in order to refine your own opinion/position through the meaningful dialogue you are having with your peers.
• NOTE: THE OUTLINE, THE DOCUMENTS/RESEARCH THAT WAS PROVIDED, AND YOUR NOTES/TEXTBOOK CAN BE USED FOR REFERENCE DURING THE SOCRATIC SEMINAR!

Grading: 100 points (essays/projects)
• Refer to the rubric attached.

IMPORTANT: IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT YOU ARE PRESENT FOR BOTH DAYS OF THE SOCRATIC SEMINAR!

• IF YOU’RE ABSENT ONE OF THE DAYS:
  o YOUR GRADE WILL BE SOLEY BASED OFF OF YOUR PARTICIPATION FOR THAT ONE DAY!
• IF YOU’RE ABSENT FOR BOTH DAYS:
  o YOU WILL HAVE TO COMPLETE AN ALTERNATE ASSIGNMENT (I.E. ARGUMENTATIVE RESEARCH ESSAY)!
The rise of a city, which swelled into an Empire, may deserve, as a singular prodigy, the reflection of a philosophic mind. But the decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and, as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight. The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and, instead of inquiring why the Roman empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long. The victorious legions, who, in distant wars, acquired the vices of strangers and mercenaries, first oppressed the freedom of the republic, and afterwards violated the majesty of the purple. The emperors, anxious for their personal safety and the public peace, were reduced to the base expedient of corrupting the discipline which rendered them alike formidable to their sovereign and to the enemy; the vigour of the military government was relaxed, and finally dissolved, by the partial institutions of Constantine; and the Roman world was overwhelmed by a deluge of Barbarians.

The decay of Rome has been frequently ascribed to the translation of the seat of empire; but this history has already shewn that the powers of government were divided rather than removed. The throne of Constantinople was erected in the East, while the West was still possessed by a series of emperors who held their residence in Italy and claimed their equal inheritance of the legions and provinces. This dangerous novelty impaired the strength, and fomented the vices, of a double reign; the instruments of an oppressive and arbitrary system were multiplied; and a vain emulation of luxury, not of merit, was introduced and supported between the degenerate successors of Theodosius. Extreme distress, which unites the virtue of a free people, embitters the factions of a declining monarchy...During a long period of decay, his impregnable city repelled the victorious armies of Barbarians, protected the wealth of Asia, and commanded, both in peace and war, the important straits which connect the Euxine and Mediterranean seas. The foundation of Constantinople more essentially contributed to the preservation of the East than to the ruin of the West.

As the happiness of a future life is the great object of religion, we may hear, without surprise or scandal, that the introduction, or at least the abuse, of Christianity had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman empire. The clergy successfully preached the doctrines of patience and pusillanimity; the active virtues of society were discouraged; and the last remains of the military spirit were buried in the cloister; a large portion of public and private wealth was consecrated to the specious demands of charity and devotion; and the soldiers' pay was lavished on the useless multitudes of both sexes, who could only plead the merits of abstinence and chastity. Faith, zeal, curiosity, and the more earthly passions of malice and ambition kindled the flame of theological discord; the church, and even the state, were distracted by religious factions, whose conflicts were sometimes bloody, and always implacable; the attention of the emperors was diverted from camps to synods; the Roman world was oppressed by a new species of tyranny; and the persecuted sects became the secret enemies of their country.

This awful revolution may be usefully applied to the instruction of the present age. It is the duty of a patriot to prefer and promote the exclusive interest and glory of his native country; but a philosopher may be permitted to enlarge his
views, and to consider Europe as one great republic, whose various inhabitants have attained almost the same level of politeness and cultivation. The balance of power will continue to fluctuate, and the prosperity of our own or the neighbouring kingdoms may be alternately exalted or depressed; but these partial events cannot essentially injure our general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners, which so advantageously distinguish, above the rest of mankind, the Europeans and their colonies.

The Romans were ignorant of the extent of their danger, and the number of their enemies. Beyond the Rhine and Danube, the northern countries of Europe and Asia were filled with innumerable tribes of hunters and shepherds, poor, voracious, and turbulent; bold in arms, and impatient to ravish the fruits of industry... The Huns, who fled before a victorious enemy, directed their march towards the West; and the torrent was swelled by the gradual accession of captives and allies... Instead of some rude villages, thinly scattered among its woods and morasses, Germany now produces a list of two thousand three hundred walled towns; the Christian kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden, and Poland, have been successively established; and the Hanse merchants, with the Teutonic knights, have extended their colonies along the coast of the Baltic, as far as the Gulf of Finland. From the Gulf of Finland to the Eastern Ocean, Russia now assumes the form of a powerful and civilized empire.

The empire of Rome was firmly established by the singular and perfect coalition of its members. The subject nations, resigning the hope, and even the wish, of independence, embraced the character of Roman citizens; and the provinces of the West were reluctantly torn by the Barbarians from the bosom of their mother-country.[7] But this union was purchased by the loss of national freedom and military spirit; and the servile provinces, destitute of life and motion, expected their safety from the mercenary troops and governors, who were directed by the orders of a distant court. The happiness of an hundred millions depended on the personal merit of one or two men, perhaps children, whose minds were corrupted by education, luxury, and despotic power.

Cold, poverty, and a life of danger and fatigue, fortify the strength and courage of Barbarians. In every age they have oppressed the polite and peaceful nations of China, India, and Persia, who neglected, and still neglect, to counterbalance these natural powers by the resources of military art. The warlike states of antiquity, Greece, Macedonia, and Rome, educated a race of soldiers; exercised their bodies, disciplined their courage, multiplied their forces by regular evolutions, and converted the iron which they possessed into strong and serviceable weapons. But this superiority insensibly declined with their laws and manners; and the feeble policy of Constantine and his successors armed and instructed, for the ruin of the empire, the rude valour of the Barbarian mercenaries. The military art has been changed by the invention of gunpowder; which enables man to command the two most powerful agents of nature, air and fire.

Should these speculations be found doubtful or fallacious, there still remains a more humble source of comfort and hope. The discoveries of ancient and modern navigators, and the domestic history, or tradition, of the most enlightened nations, represent the human savage, naked both in mind and body, and destitute of laws, of arts, of ideas, and almost of language.[10] From this abject condition, perhaps the primitive and universal state of man, he has gradually arisen to command the animals, to fertilise the earth, to traverse the ocean, and to measure the heavens... Yet the experience of four thousand years should enlarge our hopes, and diminish our apprehensions; we
cannot determine to what height the human species may aspire in their advances towards perfection; but it may safely be presumed that no people, unless the face of nature is changed, will relapse into their original barbarism. The improvements of society may be viewed under a threefold aspect. 1. The poet or philosopher illustrates his age and country by the efforts of a single mind; but these superior powers of reason or fancy are rare and spontaneous productions, and the genius of Homer, or Cicero, or Newton, would excite less admiration, if they could be created by the will of a prince or the lessons of a preceptor. 2. The benefits of law and policy, of trade and manufactures, of arts and sciences, are more solid and permanent; and many individuals may be qualified, by education and discipline, to promote, in their respective stations, the interest of the community... 3. Fortunately for mankind, the more useful, or, at least, more necessary arts can be performed without superior talents, or national subordination; without the powers of one or the union of many. Each village, each family, each individual, must always possess both ability and inclination to perpetuate the use of fire and of metals; the propagation and service of domestic animals; the methods of hunting and fishing; the rudiments of navigation; the imperfect cultivation of corn or other nutritive grain; and the simple practice of the mechanic trades.
Since the first discovery of the arts, war, commerce, and religious zeal have diffused, among the savages of the Old and New World, those inestimable gifts: they have been successively propagated; they can never be lost. We may therefore acquiesce in the pleasing conclusion that every age of the world has increased, and still increases, the real wealth, the happiness, the knowledge, and perhaps the virtue, of the human race.

Questions for Analysis:
1. List five things Gibbon alludes to as causes for the fall of the Roman Empire AND explain each with historical context:

   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

   e.

2. Of the issues listed above, in your opinion, which was the most detrimental to the preservation of the Roman Empire? Why?
Document #2: BASED ON OSWALD SPENGLER’S THE DECLINE OF THE WEST

German historian Oswald Spengler argues civilizations, similar to individuals, go through a life-cycle with distinct stages. Spengler applies these stages to his study of the great ancient and classical civilizations/empires (Egypt, India, Rome, etc). Spengler argues, like human beings, civilizations/empires also must one day die.

Listed below are the four basic stages of the cultural “life” and “death” of a civilization/empire, according to Spengler. The stages are equated to the four seasons of the year:

| Stage I | “Springtime” | Culture shows great willpower, or “Soul”. In this period, people of a culture produce art and political forms to express their view of the world. The knight/warrior, and the men of noble blood are the rulers. |
| Stage II | “Summertime” | The first stirrings of revolt against springtime form. Pre-existing attitudes towards rulers, power, and religion are challenged. This stage marks beginning of an urban-based culture. The merchant becomes a powerful member of society. |
| Stage III | “Autumn” | In this stage the culture becomes a powerful civilization ruled by city-dwellers. Government becomes more complex. Religion is overshadowed by belief in the human mind and scientific reasoning. |
| Stage IV | “Winter” | The culture enters a state of self-doubt. It looks for a new philosophy of life. Former connections with the land (peasantry) are almost completely lost. The masses of the city are the ruling force. The culture has lost some of its identity, will, and “Soul”. |

Spengler estimated the life spans of the following civilizations, based on his theory & study of history:

- **Egyptian Culture** Begins 3000 BC – Declines 1500 BC
- **Indian Culture** Begins 1550 BC – Declines 400 BC
- **Classical Culture** Begins 1100 BC – Declines 27 BC (rise of Augustus & beginning of Roman Empire)
- **Roman Culture** Begins 509 BC – Declines 476 AD
- **Arabian Culture** Begins 0 – Declines 1000 AD

**Questions for Analysis:**

1. Do you generally agree with the breakdown of the stages provided by Spengler’s ideas? Why or why not?

2. If you had to argue what “season” the United States is currently in, what would your argument be? Explain.
1. **Necessary preconditions for the rise of empires—the region must have:**
   a) State-level government
   b) High agricultural potential of the environment
   c) An environmental mosaic
   d) Several small states with no clear dominant state (power vacuum)
   e) Mutual antagonism among those states
   f) Adequate military resources (or a military or technological advantage)

2. **States succeed in empire building if they have an ideology that promotes personal identification with the state, empire, leader, conquest, and/or militarism.**

3. **Characteristics of well-run empires**
   a) Build roads and transportation systems, canals, ports, etc.
   b) Trade increases
   c) Cosmopolitan cities—art and education flourish
   d) Effective bureaucracy to ensure communication, collect taxes, oversee coinage, ensure the laws are enforced
   e) Common official language (communication)
   f) System of justice, law for entire empire
   g) Citizenship or rights extend in some degree to conquered; must be some “buy-in”

4. **Major results of empire:**
   a) Economic rewards, especially in the early years, redistributed to elite and trickles down to other classes (esp. merchants, scribes, etc.)
   b) Relative stability and prosperity
   c) Population increase

5. **Empires fall because:**
   a) Failure of leadership; focus on wealth, etc. not the needs of the state
   b) Ideology of expansion and conquest leads to attempting new conquests beyond a practical limit: overstretching of bureaucracy, military, resources, communications
   c) Lack of new conquests erodes economic base and lessens faith in ideology of the empire
   d) Rebellions from within/ challenges from without

**Questions for Analysis:**
1. Apply the five stages of Demarest’s model to the Roman Republic/Empire. Does it fit the model? Explain why or why not.

2. Do you agree with Demarest’s characteristics of what makes a “well-run” empire? Are there any criteria you would add/remove from this list?

3. Based on the information above, should the United States be considered an “empire”? Why or why not?

"Rome is still looked upon as the queen of the earth, and the name of the Roman people is respected and venerated. But the magnificence of Rome is defaced by the inconsiderate levity of a few, who never recollect where they are born, but fall away into error and licentiousness as if a perfect immunity were granted to vice. Of these men, some, thinking that they can be handed down to immortality by means of statues, are eager after them, as if they would obtain a higher reward from brazen figures unendowed with sense than from a consciousness of upright and honorable actions; and they are even anxious to have them plated over with gold!

Others place the summit of glory in having a couch higher than usual, or splendid apparel; and so toil and sweat under a vast burden of cloaks which are fastened to their necks by many clasps, and blow about by the excessive fineness of the material, showing a desire by the continual wriggling of their bodies, and especially by the waving of the left hand, to make more conspicuous their long fringes and tunics, which are embroidered in multiform figures of animals with threads of divers colors.

Others again, put on a feigned severity of countenance, and extol their patrimonial estates in a boundless degree, exaggerating the yearly produce of their fruitful fields, which they boast of possessing in numbers, from east and west, being forsooth ignorant that their ancestors, who won greatness for Rome, were not eminent in riches; but through many a direful war overpowered their foes by valor, though little above the common privates in riches, or luxury, or costliness of garments.

If now you, as an honorable stranger, should enter the house of any passing rich man, you will be hospitably received, as though you were very welcome; and after having had many questions put to you, and having been forced to tell a number of lies, you will wonder---since the gentleman has never seen you before---that a person of high rank should pay such attention to a humble individual like yourself, so that you become exceeding happy, and begin to repent not having come to Rome ten years before. When, however, relying on this affability you do the same thing the next day, you will stand waiting as one utterly unknown and unexpected, while he who yesterday urged you to “come again,” counts upon his fingers who you can be, marveling for a long time whence you came, and what you can want. But when at last you are recognized and admitted to his acquaintance, if you should devote yourself to him for three years running, and after that cease with your visits for the same stretch of time, then at last begin them again, you will never be asked about your absence any more than if you had been dead, and you will waste your whole life trying to court the humors of this blockhead.

But when those long and unwholesome banquets, which are indulged in at periodic intervals, begin to be prepared, or the distribution of the usual dole baskets takes place, then it is discussed with anxious care, whether, when those to whom a return is due are to be entertained, it is also proper to ask in a stranger; and if after the question has been duly sifted, it is determined that this may be done, the person preferred is one who hangs around all night before the houses of charioteers, or one who claims to be an expert with dice, or affects to possess some peculiar secrets. For hosts of this stamp avoid all learned and sober men as unprofitable and useless---with this addition, that the nomenclators also, who usually make a market of these invitations and such favors, selling them for bribes, often for a fee thrust into these dinners mean and obscure creatures indeed.

The whirlpool of banquets, and divers other allurements of luxury I omit, lest I grow too prolix. Many people drive on their horses recklessly, as if they were post horses, with a legal right of way, straight down the boulevards of the city, and over the flint-paved streets, dragging behind them huge bodies of slaves, like bands of robbers. And many matrons, imitating these men, gallop over every quarter of the city, with their heads covered, and in closed carriages. And so the stewards of these
city households make careful arrangement of the cortege; the stewards themselves being conspicuous by the wands in their right hands. First of all before the master's carriage march all his slaves concerned with spinning and working; next come the blackened crew employed in the kitchen; then the whole body of slaves promiscuously mixed with a gang of idle plebeians; and last of all, the multitude of eunuchs, beginning with the old men and ending with the boys, pale and unsightly from the deformity of their features.

Those few mansions which were once celebrated for the serious cultivation of liberal studies, now are filled with ridiculous amusements of torpid indolence, reechoing with the sound of singing, and the tinkle of flutes and lyres. You find a singer instead of a philosopher; a teacher of silly arts is summoned in place of an orator, the libraries are shut up like tombs, organs played by waterpower are built, and lyres so big that they look like wagons! and flutes, and huge machines suitable for the theater. The Romans have even sunk so far, that not long ago, when a dearth was apprehended, and the foreigners were driven from the city, those who practiced liberal accomplishments were expelled instantly, yet the followers of actresses and all their ilk were suffered to stay; and three thousand dancing girls were not even questioned, but remained unmolested along with the members of their choruses, and a corresponding number of dancing masters.

On account of the frequency of epidemics in Rome, rich men take absurd precautions to avoid contagion, but even when these rules are observed thus stringently, some persons, if they be invited to a wedding, though the vigor of their limbs be vastly diminished, yet when gold is pressed in their palm they will go with all activity as far as Spoletum! So much for the nobles. As for the lower and poorer classes some spend the whole night in the wine shops, some lie concealed in the shady arcades of the theaters. They play at dice so eagerly as to quarrel over them, snuffing up their nostrils, and making unseemly noises by drawing back their breath into their noses:—or (and this is their favorite amusement by far) from sunrise till evening, through sunshine or rain, they stay gaping and examining the charioteers and their horses; and their good and bad qualities. Wonderful indeed it is to see an innumerable multitude of people, with prodigious eagerness, intent upon the events of the chariot race!"


Questions for Analysis:
1. In this primary source account, how does the author describe Roman values and attitudes in the late days of the empire?

2. Give some examples of social inequalities and/or causes for civil unrest shown in the passage:
   a.
   b.
   c.
Socratic Seminar Grading Rubric (100 Points Total)

A. **(20 points) Number of Contributions** - How often did you speak?
B. **(50 points) Quality of Contributions** - quality contributions offers a new idea, not yet expressed, or the comment takes a new approach to previously stated ideas. Did you build off the ideas of others without repeating information? Did you ask questions that further the discussion? Did you stay on topic while helping move the discussion forward?
C. **(15 points) Conduct** – Did you listen actively to others and focus only on the seminar?
D. **(15 points) Delivery** – Did you speak clearly and succinctly to the group, not the teacher?

### A. Number of contributions (20 points)

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<th>No comments</th>
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### B. Quality of contributions (50 points)

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<th>Little or no comment; shows lack of preparation</th>
<th>Repeats others comments; no text support; off topic; shows poor preparations</th>
<th>Some original ideas expressed but lack depth; not always supported by text; shows only fair preparations</th>
<th>Original ideas expressed; adequate text support; shows adequate preparation</th>
<th>Original ideas expressed; advanced understanding expressed; offers new idea/approach; shows thorough preparation</th>
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<td>22.5 points</td>
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### C. Conduct (15 points)

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<tr>
<th>Distracts others, interrupts or insults others</th>
<th>Demonstrates respect, loses focus occasionally</th>
<th>Demonstrates respect and enthusiasm for seminar, listens actively &amp; participates</th>
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<td>6.75 points</td>
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### D. Delivery (15 points)

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<th>Exhibits little or no awareness of audience, speaks too softly, no pacing (no comments made)</th>
<th>Exhibits some awareness of audience thru eye contact, speaks too softly, attempts pacing</th>
<th>Cleary attends to audience through succinct speech, good eye contact &amp; gestures, speaks clearly, uses pacing effectively</th>
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