

FALL OF ROME SOCRATIC SEMINAR

PART 1. *Directions:* Analyze the following documents and answer their accompanying questions. As you do this, keep in mind the following "big picture" question:

Can the lessons of the fall of Rome be applied to the United States today? Why or why not?

Document 1

"No Man's Land"

Words and Music by Billy Joel

I've seen those big machines come rolling through the quiet pines
Blue suits and bankers with their Volvos and their valentines
Give us this day our daily discount outlet merchandise
Raise up a multiplex and we will make a sacrifice
Now we're gonna get the big business
Now we're gonna get the real thing
Everybody's all excited about it

Who remembers when it all began - out here in No Man's Land
Before they passed the master plan - out here in No Man's Land
Low supply and high demand - here in No Man's Land

There ain't much work out here in our consumer power base
No major industry, just miles and miles of parking space
This morning's paper says our neighbor's in a cocaine bust
Lots more to read about Lolita and suburban lust
Now we're gonna get the whole story
Now we're gonna be in prime time
Everybody's all excited about it

Who remembers when it all began - out here in No Man's Land
We've just begun to understand - out here in No Man's Land
Low supply and high demand - here in No Man's Land

I see these children with their boredom and their vacant stares
God help us all if we're to blame for their unanswered prayers
They roll the sidewalks up at night this place goes underground
Thanks to the Condo Kings there's cable now in Zombietown
Now we're gonna get the closed circuit
Now we're gonna get the Top 40
Now we're gonna get the sports franchise
Now we're gonna get the major attractions

Who remembers when it all began - out here in No Man's Land
Before the whole world was in our hands - out here in No Man's Land
Before the banners and the marching bands - out here in No Man's Land
Low supply and high demand - here in No Man's Land

1. According to the first line of the song, what has modern America done to its natural resources?

2. The third line of the song uses a play-on-words in reference to the "Our Father" prayer. According to the singer, what does America worship more than God?

3. Name three things that modern America values according to the song.

4. What do you think is the meaning of the phrase, "Before the whole world was in our hands"? (3rd line from the end of the song)

5. What **similarity** do you see between the fall of Rome and what is described in this document?

Document 2

Preamble

The United States Constitution

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

1. What is the purpose of the Constitution's preamble?

2. What types of government did Rome have? What type of government does the United States have?

3. What **difference** do you see between the fall of Rome and what is described in this document?

Document 3

Thirteenth Amendment The United States Constitution

"Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

1. What is the purpose of the Constitution's 13th Amendment?

2. What **difference** do you see between the fall of Rome and what is described in this document?

Document 4



1. What is the literal interpretation of this political cartoon? In other words, what do you see?

2. What is the analytical interpretation of this political cartoon? In other words, what does it represent?

3. If this political cartoon were to represent Ancient Rome, how would the words in the cartoon have to change? In other words, what were the many problems that the Roman government had to deal with?

4. What **similarity** do you see between the fall of Rome and what is described in this document?

Document 5

***The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* Lawrence Wright**

"Bin Laden...hoped to lure America into the same trap the Soviets had fallen into: Afghanistan. His strategy was to continually attack until the U.S. forces invaded; then the mujahideen would swarm upon them and bleed them until the entire American empire fell from its wounds. It had happened to Great Britain and to the Soviet Union. He was certain it would happen to America. The declaration of war, the strike on the American embassies, and now the bombing of the [U.S.S.] *Cole* [American ship] had been inadequate, however, to provoke a massive retaliation. He would have to create an irresistible outrage [9/11]."

1. What did Bin Laden hope to do? What was his strategy for doing so?

2. Who were the "terrorists" of Ancient Rome?

3. What **similarity** do you see between the fall of Rome and what is described in this document?

Document 6

***Are We Rome?* Cullen Murphy**

"But America does possess one quality that Rome didn't have at all. Rome's elites were deeply satisfied.... Their motto might have been... "It doesn't get any better than this." Americans would glare in disbelief at Rome's self-satisfaction. Striving to make live "better than this," for ourselves and for others, for people living now and for those to come, is part of our social compact. Americans maintain a deep faith in the promise of invention and reinvention.... Rome's economy was the same at the beginning as it was at the end: agrarian, Iron Age, preindustrial. America has lived through more social transformation in a few centuries than Rome did in a millennium."

1. According to the author, what is the one quality that America has that Rome never did?

2. What **difference** do you see between the fall of Rome and what is described in this document?

Preparation for Socratic Seminar:

Can the lessons of the fall of Rome be applied to the United States today? Why or why not? Organize your argument below:

YES

NO