

CHOICE

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SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

History, Geography & Area Studies - North America

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The following review appeared in the January 2011 issue of CHOICE:

48-2896 E169 2009-19763 CIP
Smil, Vaclav. **Why America is not a new Rome.** MIT, 2010. 226p bibl indexes afp ISBN 9780262195935, \$24.95

Smil (Univ. of Manitoba, Canada) has written an entertaining response to authors who have compared the US to the Roman Empire, from Soviet-era propagandists to Niall Ferguson's *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (CH, Nov'04, 42-1836). Hyperbole aside, there is some basis of comparison in the increasing materialism of US culture focused on drug-crazed pop stars, overpaid athletes, and an obscene Hollywood value system at a time when US political and economic systems are in a state of free fall. Yet this is a superficial similarity. Any comparison will be false in an essential manner. While the US may resemble Rome in its rise from a small republic to a major power, 21st-century globalism is far different than the ancient past. Many powers have been compared to Rome, including the Spanish and British empires. Trained as an environmental scientist interested in systems, Smil sees the US as far more creative than derivative Roman culture. Polybius said of Rome that it was without precedent in its own time; Smil says the same of the US. Well illustrated. **Summing Up:** Recommended. All levels/libraries. -- *S. Prisco III, emeritus, Stevens Institute of Technology*