

America's eerie parallels to downfall of Rome

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The fall of Rome

The fall of Rome was a culmination of several external and internal factors.

### **Great Wall of China**

By 220 A.D., the Later Eastern Han Dynasty had extended sections of the Great Wall of China along its Mongolian border. This resulted in the Northern Huns attacking west instead of east. This caused a domino effect of tribes migrating west across Central Asia, and overrunning the Western Roman Empire.

### **Open borders**

Illegal immigrants poured across the Roman borders: Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Franks, Anglos, Saxons, Alemanni, Thuringians, Rugians, Jutes, Picts, Burgundians, Lombards, Alans, Vandals as well as African Berbers and Arab raiders.

Will and Ariel Durant wrote in “The Story of Civilization” (Vol. 3 – Caesar and Christ, Simon & Schuster, 1944, p. 366): “If Rome had not engulfed so many men of alien blood in so brief a time, if she had passed all these newcomers through her schools instead of her slums, if she had treated them as men with a hundred potential excellences, if she had occasionally closed her gates to let assimilation catch up with infiltration, she might have gained new racial and literary vitality from the infusion, and might have remained a Roman Rome, the voice and citadel of the West.”

### **Loss of common language**

At first immigrants assimilated and learned the Latin language. They worked as servants, with many rising to leadership. But then they came so fast they did not learn Latin, but instead created a mix of Latin with their own Germanic, Frankish and Anglo tribal tongues. The unity of the Roman Empire began to dissolve.

### **The welfare state**

“Bread and the Circus!” Starting in 123 B.C., the immensely powerful Roman politician Gaius Gracchus began appealing citizens with welfare, a monthly handout of a free dole (handout) of grain.

Roman poet Juvenal (circa 100 A.D.) described how Roman emperors controlled the masses by keeping them ignorant and obsessed with self-indulgence, so that they would be distracted and not throw them out of office, which they might do if they realized the true condition of the Empire: “Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions – everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: bread and circuses.”

The Durants wrote in “The Lessons of History” (p. 92): “The concentration of population and poverty in great cities may compel a government to choose between enfeebling the economy with a dole or running the risk of riot and revolution.”

Welfare and government jobs exploded, as recorded in “Great Ages of Man – Barbarian Europe” (NY: Time-Life Books, 1968, p. 39), one Roman commented: “Those who live at the expense of the public funds are more numerous than those who provide them.”

### **Class warfare**

City centers were abandoned by the upper class, who bought up farms from rural landowners and transformed them into palatial estates. The Durants wrote in “The Story of Civilization” (Vol. 3 – Caesar and Christ, Simon & Schuster, 1944, p.90): “The Roman landowner disappeared now that ownership was concentrated in a few families, and a proletariat without stake in the country filled the slums of Rome.”

Inner cities were destabilized, being also plagued with lead poisoning, as water was brought in through lead pipes. (“Plumb” or “plumbing” is the Latin word for “lead.”)

The value of human life was low. Slavery and sex-trafficking abounded, especially of captured peoples from Eastern Europe. “Slavs,” which meant “glorious,” came to have the inglorious meaning of a permanent servant or “slave.” (“Great Ages,” p. 18)

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### **Taxes**

Taxes became unbearable, as “collectors became greedy functionaries in a bureaucracy so huge and corrupt.” Tax collectors were described by the historian Salvian as “more terrible than the enemy.” (“Great Ages,” p. 20).

Arther Ferrill wrote in “The Fall of the Roman Empire: The Military Explanation” (New York: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1986): “The chief cause of the agricultural decline was high taxation on the marginal land, driving it out of cultivation.”

There was a loss of patriotism, wealth began to flee the empire, and with it, the spirit of liberty. President William Henry Harrison warned in his inaugural address, 1841: “It was the beautiful remark of a distinguished English writer that ‘in the Roman senate Octavius had a party and Antony a party, but the Commonwealth had none’ ... The spirit of liberty had fled, and, avoiding the abodes of civilized man, had sought protection in the wilds of Scythia or Scandinavia; and so under the operation of the same causes and influences it will fly from our Capitol and our forums.”

More recently, John F. Kennedy observed, Jan. 6, 1961: “Present tax laws may be stimulating in undue amounts the flow of American capital to industrial countries abroad.”

### **Outsourcing**

Rome's economy stagnated from a large trade deficit, as grain production was outsourced to North Africa. Gerald Simons wrote in "Great Ages of Man – Barbarian Europe" (NY: Time-Life Books, 1968, p. 39): "As conquerors of North Africa, the Vandals cut off the Empire's grain supply at will. This created critical food shortages, which in turn curtailed Roman counterattacks."

### **Debt preceded fall**

Emperor Diocletian imposed wage and price controls and forbade people from changing professions. Choking taxes and personal debt caused many to abandon their mortgaged property and flee as ex-pats to live amongst the barbarians, renouncing their Roman citizenship. Diocletian responded by making it illegal to abandon one's mortgaged property, thus permanently tying people to the land in what became the "feudal system" in the Middle Ages.

Enormous public debt and government bureaucracy crippled Rome's economy. The Durants wrote in "The Lessons of History" (p. 92): "Huge bureaucratic machinery was unable to govern the empire effectively with the enormous, out-of-control debt."

In "Great Ages of Man – Barbarian Europe" (NY: Time-Life Books, 1968, p. 20), Gerald Simons wrote: "The Western Roman economy, already undermined by falling production of the great Roman estates and an unfavorable balance of trade that siphoned off gold to the East, had now run out of money."

### **Self-promoting and corrupt politicians**

The Durants wrote in "The Lessons of History" (p. 92): "The educated and skilled pursued business and financial success to the neglect of their involvement in politics."

Richard A. Todd wrote in "The Fall of the Roman Empire" (Eerdmans' "Handbook to the History of Christianity," Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1977, p. 184): "The church, while preaching against abuses, contributed to the decline by discouraging good Christians from holding public office."

### **Violent entertainment**

The Circus Maximus and Coliseum were packed with crowds of Romans engrossed with violent entertainment, games, chariot races, and until 404 A.D., gladiators fighting to the death.

Gerald Simons wrote in "Great Ages of Man – Barbarian Europe" (NY: Time-Life Books, 1968, p. 20): "In the causal brutality of its public spectacles, in a rampant immorality that even Christianity could not check."

### **Exposure of unwanted infants**

Roman demographics changed as families had fewer children. Some would sell unwanted children into slavery or leave them outside exposed to the weather to die, as was the practice till 374 A.D.

The Durants wrote in “The Story of Civilization,” Vol. 3 – Caesar and Christ (Simon & Schuster, 1944, p. 134): “Children were now luxuries which only the poor could afford.”

### **Immorality**

Rome was corrupted with court favoritism, the patronage system, injustice in the legal system, infidelity, perverted bathhouses, sexual immorality, gluttony and gymnasiums (“gym” being the Greek word for “naked”).

Fifth century historian Salvian wrote: “For all the lurid Roman tales of their atrocities ... the barbarians displayed ... a good deal more fidelity to their wives.” (“Great Ages,” p. 13.)

Salvian continued: “O Roman people be ashamed; be ashamed of your lives. Almost no cities are free of evil dens, are altogether free of impurities, except the cities in which the barbarians have begun to live. ... Let nobody think otherwise, the vices of our bad lives have alone conquered us. ... The Goths lie, but are chaste, the Franks lie, but are generous, the Saxons are savage in cruelty ... but are admirable in chastity. ... What hope can there be for the Romans when the barbarians are more pure than they?”

Samuel Adams wrote to John Scollay of Boston, April 30, 1776: “The diminution of public virtue is usually attended with that of public happiness, and the public liberty will not long survive the total extinction of morals. ‘The Roman Empire,’ says the historian, ‘must have sunk, though the Goths had not invaded it. Why? Because the Roman virtue was sunk.’”

### **Military cuts**

Though militarily superior and marching on advanced road systems, the highly-trained Roman legions were strained fighting conflicts from the Rhine River to the Sassanid Persian Empire. Roman borders were over-extended and the military defending them was cut back to dangerously low ranks.

The Durants wrote in “The Story of Civilization” (Vol. 3 – Caesar and Christ, Simon & Schuster, 1944, p.90): “The new generation, having inherited world mastery, had no time or inclination to defend it; that readiness for war which had characterized the Roman landowner disappeared.”

### **Terrorist attacks**

Called the “Scourge of God,” Attila the Hun was thought to be the anti-Christ, as he devastated Europe with his half-million warriors.

Aquileia, one of the largest cities in the world at the time, was so completely destroyed that inhabitants ran into the ocean, hammered down logs and lived on platforms which grew into the city of Venice.

St. Genevieve called Paris to pray in 451 A.D., and for some reason Attila turned aside, sparing the city.

Pope Leo rode out to meet Attila in 452 A.D. and persuaded him not to sack Rome, delaying the city's fall 24 more years.

Finally the barbarian Chieftain Odoacer attacked. Rome is considered to have officially fallen on Sept. 4, 476 A.D.

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