

## DBQ 2: Fall of the Western Roman Empire

### **Historical Context:**

In the third century A.D. Rome faced many problems. In addition to internal decay, the invasion by Germanic tribes seemed to sound the death knell for the Western Roman Empire. Historians have examined both the internal conditions that weakened the expansive empire and the external force of the barbarian invasions and have presented a variety of explanations for the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

- ◆ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author's point of view. Be sure to:
1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
  2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
  3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
  4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
  5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

**Question:** *What caused the fall of the Western Roman Empire?*

- ◆ **Part A:** The following documents address the causes for the fall of Rome. Examine each document carefully, and answer the questions that follow.

### **Document 1**

This excerpt is from a textbook, *The Course of Civilization* by Strayer, Gatzke, and Harbison (Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961).

The basic trouble was that very few inhabitants of the empire believed that the old civilization was worth saving . . . the overwhelming majority of the population had been systematically excluded from political responsibilities. They could not organize to protect themselves; they could not serve in the army. . . . Their economic plight was hopeless. Most of them were serfs bound to the soil, and the small urban groups saw their cities slipping into uninterrupted decline.

What were the basic problems facing the Western Roman Empire according to these authors?

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*(continued)*



## DBQ 2: Fall of the Western Roman Empire *(continued)*

### Document 2

This is an excerpt from *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon.

The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness [large size] . . . The introduction . . . of Christianity, had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman empire. The clergy successfully preached the doctrine of patience; the active virtues of society were discouraged; and the last remains of military spirit were buried in the cloister; a large portion of public and private wealth was consecrated to the . . . demands of charity and devotion. . . .

According to this excerpt from Gibbon, what were two causes for the fall of Rome? Explain both.

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### Document 3

This excerpt is from *Uses of the Past* by Herbert J. Muller.

First the economic factor . . . While the empire was expanding, its prosperity was fed by plundered wealth and by new markets in the semi-barbaric provinces. When the empire ceased to expand, however, economic progress soon ceased. . . .

The abundance of slaves led to the growth of the *latifundia*, the great estates that . . . came to dominate agriculture and ruin the free *coloni* [farmers] who drifted to the cities, to add to the unemployment there. The abundance of slaves likewise kept wages low.

What economic issues does Muller identify as causes for decline? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

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How was slavery a cause for the decline of the Roman Empire? \_\_\_\_\_

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*(continued)*



**DBQ 2: Fall of the Western Roman Empire (continued)**

**Document 4**

This excerpt, from *The New Deal in Old Rome* by Henry Haskell, blames the decline on the heavy taxation required to support the government's expenses.

... Part of the money went into ... the maintenance of the army and of the vast bureaucracy required by a centralized government ... the expense led to strangling taxation. ... The heart was taken out of enterprising men ... tenants fled from their farms and businessmen and workmen from their occupations. Private enterprise was crushed and the state was forced to take over many kinds of business to keep the machine running. People learned to expect something for nothing. The old Roman virtues of self-reliance and initiative were lost in that part of the population on relief [welfare]. ... The central government undertook such far-reaching responsibility in affairs that the fiber of the citizens weakened.

Why did the Roman government have large expenses? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the effect of high taxation on the people? \_\_\_\_\_

What effect did the establishment of a governmental welfare system have on the people? \_\_\_\_\_

**Document 5**

This excerpt, from *Romans Without Laurels* by Indro Montanelli, blames the fall on "internal decay," specifically that of the military.

Rome, like all great empires, was not overthrown by external enemies but undermined by internal decay. ... The military crisis was the result of ... proud old aristocracy's ... shortage of children. [Consequently] foreigners poured into this ... void [lack of soldiers]. The Roman army [was] composed entirely of Germans.

What does this author identify as the cause of problems in the military? \_\_\_\_\_

(continued)



## Document 6

Source: Chart compiled from various sources.

### Roman Emperors, 235-285 CE

Emperor	Reign	Cause of Death
Maximinus	235-38 CE	Assassination
Gordian I & II (co-rulers)	238	Suicide; killed in battle
Balbinus & Pupineus	238	Assassination
Gordian III	238-44	Possible assassination
Philip the Arab	244-49	Killed in battle
Decius	249-51	Killed in battle
Hostilian	251	Possible plague
Gallus	251-53	Assassination
Aemilianus	253	Assassination
Valerian & Gallienus	253-60	Died as slave of Persians; assassination
Claudius Gothicus	268-70	Plague
Quintillus	270	Assassination or suicide
Aurelian	270-75	Assassination
Tacitus	275-76	Possible assassination
Florianus	276	Assassination
Probus	276-82	Assassination
Carus	282-83	Assassination
Numerian	283-84	Possible assassination
Carinus	283-85	Killed in battle

### Document Analysis

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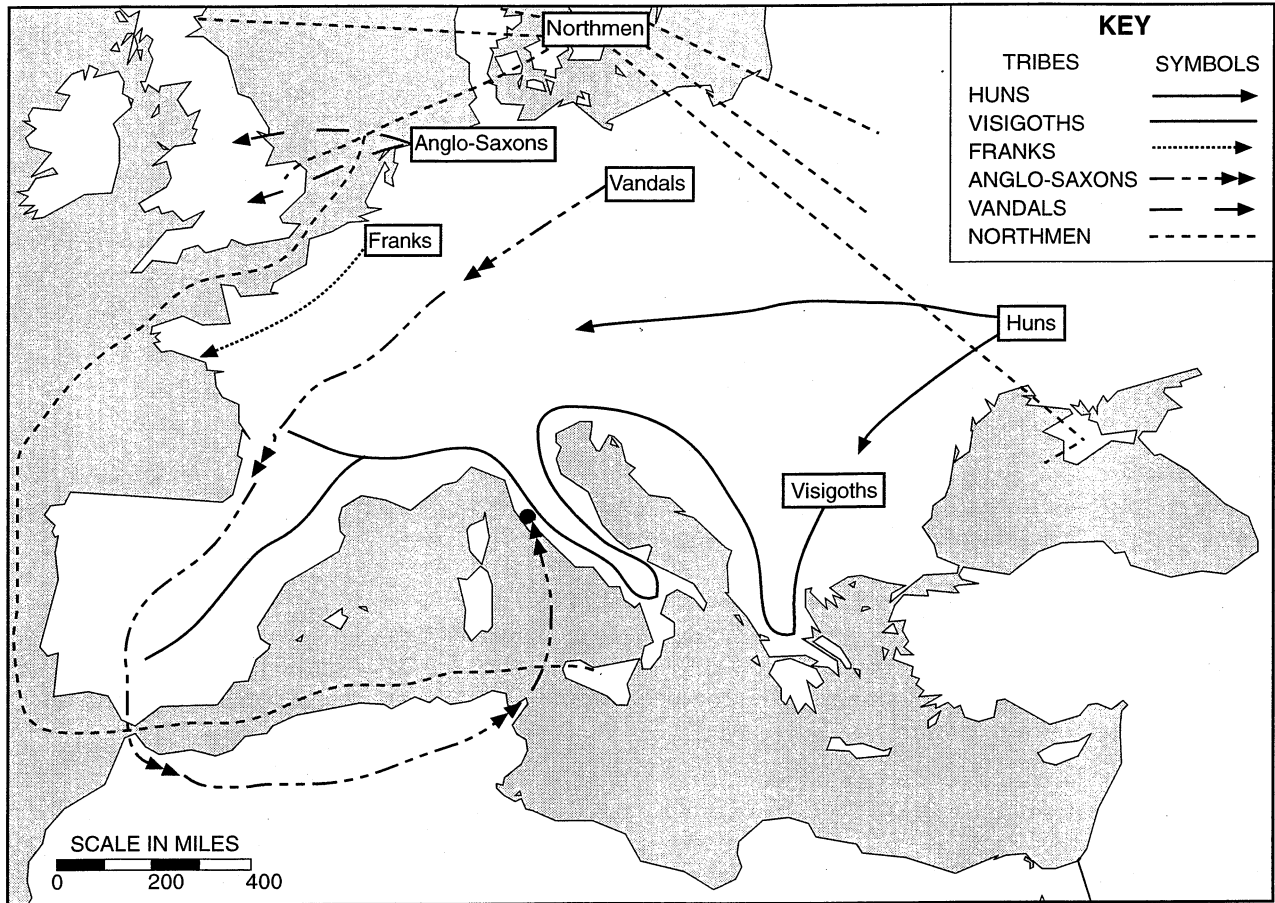
1. How many Roman emperors ruled during the 50-year period covered by this chart?

- How many Roman emperors ruled during the 50-year period covered by this chart? How many died a natural death? How many were victims of assassinations or possible assassinations?
- What message might these frequent and violent changes in leadership have sent to the people of the Roman Empire?
- What message might these frequent and violent changes in leadership have sent to people living outside the Roman Empire?

## DBQ 2: Fall of the Western Roman Empire *(continued)*

### Document 7

This map shows the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire prior to 476.



According to the map above, what was the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Was this a unified attack? \_\_\_\_\_

◆ **Part B—Essay**

*What caused the fall of the Western Roman Empire?*