

Excellent. Especially astute use of quotes and sources.
Score 99.

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A period of time known as the Pax Romana began under the rule of Augustus. It was a time of harmony and affluence in the Roman Empire. Two centuries later this peaceful period came to an end during the "Period of Crises" in the third century. During this time the Roman Empire was weakened due to many factors and this weakening was irrevocable. Emperors after this time period tried to mend the broken domain, but had little success. It eventually led to the collapse of the western half of the Roman Empire in 476 A. D. "Through the course of the third century, the empire suffered terribly from: 1) 'succession by assassination'; 2) economic woes; 3) social inequities; and 4) demographic disruption."ⁱ Though many events occurred after this period that led to Rome's downfall, the third century crises began the plummet.

During the third century, attacks on the northern and eastern fronts of the empire increased. This caused the emperors to expand the military, but there was no new income since the empire itself had not expanded as well.ⁱⁱ Therefore, the emperors were forced to find a way to fund the army, which happened to be raising taxes. The people were angry, and the generals and emperors began to battle one another. Septimius Severus began this crazy fall of reign when he "drained the treasury to satisfy the army" which caused the military to expect more from him in the future. On his deathbed Severus gave advice to his sons Caracalla and Geta to stay close to one another, pay the soldiers what they want, and ignore everyone elseⁱⁱⁱ. However this advice was brushed aside as Caracalla murdered his brother and took seat in the emperor's throne. Caracalla's profuse spending showed his lack of qualification for the emperor position. A significant act that Caracalla carried out was granting "Roman citizenship to almost every man and woman in imperial territory except slaves"^{iv}. Financial circumstances just went downhill from there. "For fifty years, a parade of emperors and pretenders fought to rule; more than two dozen men, often several at a time, held or claimed power in that time"^v. Many of these rulers

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were killed by their fellow public officers^{vi}. Failure to unite the Roman people under a stable emperor was the first sign of the fall of this grand territory. Generals would bribe their soldiers and gain their trust to ensure they would follow, rather than receive orders from the emperor and obey. Another important factor contributing to the failure of the empire is that since the emperor had little power during this time period, the soldiers far away from Rome struggled to remain faithful to a ruler so distant. "The legions, consisting predominantly of the least Romanized provincials, used their weapons to place their own commanders on the throne... Rome was drifting into anarchy"^{vii}. The sudden changes in emperors had a great effect on the military, as well as the economy.

In 212, Roman citizenship was extended to almost all who qualified in order to battle the negative results the treasury was seeing^{viii}. "Both civil war and barbarian attacks greatly disrupted the Roman economy... although heavy taxes, requisitioning of goods, and forced labor provided some stability, these measure also turned many citizens against the oppressive state."^{ix} During these hard times, emperors decided to begin the debasement of coinage. This would fight inflation by driving the costs of the government down. However, the merchants combated this move by raising prices, causing more inflation^x. Finally, with the coinage debased, inflation rising, and soldiers demanding more payments from the emperor, the treasury collapsed by the 250s A.D.^{xi}. These economic woes were all on top of the rising taxes imposed on all citizens. Resentment toward the Empire was increased because many citizens were only granted citizenship so they could be taxed. The people struggled to remain loyal to a government that used and took advantage of them. All of these problems led to many social difficulties as well.

"The Romans were dependent on slave labor"^{xii}. Though slavery was very effective and convenient for the Romans, eventually it inhibited them from growing. The treatment toward

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slaves was severe and harsh, “indeed death in their eyes is more to be desired than life because of the magnitude of the hardships they must bear”^{xiii}. So poorly were the slaves treated, that often there would be revolts. The number of slaves that would get involved in these uprisings were so great that they became costly and time consuming for the Romans to contain. “Slavery also affected attitudes of the free born. Manual labor was considered fit only for slaves. The low prestige accorded labor stifled interest in technological innovation”^{xiv}. Also due to the great number of slaves in the Roman Empire, plantations became more numerous, driving small farms under. These small farms became angry and less likely to favor and follow a government that promoted this growth. This also led to the demographic crisis during the third century.

Many epidemics and natural disasters took lives of Romans during the third century. And without sufficient food, even more died. “The population declined significantly as food supplies became less dependable, civil war killed soldiers and civilians alike, and infection flared over large regions”^{xv}. This loss of population had a chain effect that seriously injured the Roman Empire. Fewer people meant a smaller military. That meant that the borders were weakened and were an easy target for barbarians to penetrate then raid outer regions. Once invasions multiplied, it was clear that the Empire was becoming even more fragmented. During the Period of Crises in the Third Century, the damage done was irreparable. However, Rome lasted two more centuries. Through a series of events and certain creative emperors, an attempt to salvage the Roman Empire was made.

Diocletian began by splitting the Empire into two domains. He also “fixed wages and prices to ensure that the army acquired the least expensive supplies”^{xvi}. After Diocletian, Constantine acquired both halves of the Empire. However, “Constantine further weakened the western half of the empire when he moved his capital from Rome to the city previously called

Byzantium (330) and renamed it Constantinople (1937 renamed Istanbul). The shift in capital sites had portentous long-term consequences. It drew more attention to the eastern empire which was so much more populated, more cities and trade^{xvii}. Another factor that weakened the western half was the emergence of the Christians. The east embraced the church, uniting the people under religion and government. The west had nothing to unite under, especially not a stable government. The same weak emperors of the west struggled with the Germanic nations that were invading the Empire's borders. This further weakened the imperial administration. The Huns also were pushing Germanic nations into Roman territory. Little by little soldiers throughout the west retreated from their posts to answer their Emperor's calls. Odoacer, a German, finally "took the title 'King of the Romans'"^{xviii} in 476 A.D. This signaled the official fall of the Western Roman Empire.

The factor that contributed most to the fall of the western half of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D. was the failure to unite the western provinces under a central government. This began in the beginning of the third century when several emperors abused their powers and overstepped their boundaries, causing severe inflation. Then the following rulers tried to fix the problem by increasing taxes, further maddening the population. When the military did not receive the sufficient payments they demanded, anarchy began as the "succession by assassination" era took place. Generals fought their own emperors, thus further weakening the control the imperial administration had on the military. Also, slavery and other social woes added to the crises during the third century. Though for two centuries, emperors tried to mend the broken pieces of the Empire, the damage was beyond repair. It could not be united to defend itself against invaders, and had a crumbling governmental system. The lack of power that the emperors possessed led to the defeat of the Western Empire.

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- ⁱ Curtis Bostick. "Topic 5: Rome – The Empire." Introduction to Western Civilization I – HIST 1100. Last modified 5.26.09.
<<https://elearning.suu.edu/webct/urw/lc5122001.tp0/cobaltMainFrame.dowebct>>
(accessed July 13, 2009). Section F
- ⁱⁱ Lynn Hunt and others. The Making of the West. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. 188
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hunt, 190
- ^{iv} Hunt, 190
- ^v Hunt, 191
- ^{vi} Bostick, Section F
- ^{vii} Marvin Perry and others. Sources of the Western Tradition. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009. 150
- ^{viii} Bostick, Section C
- ^{ix} Perry, 126
- ^x Hunt, 189
- ^{xi} Hunt, 189
- ^{xii} Bostick, Section F
- ^{xiii} Perry, 112
- ^{xiv} Bostick, Section F
- ^{xv} Hunt, 191
- ^{xvi} Bostick, Section G
- ^{xvii} Bostick, Section G
- ^{xviii} Bostick, Section I