

### **Mini-Q Sample Essay: High Proficiency** **What Were the Primary Reasons for the "Fall" of Rome?**

When a house – even a really beautiful and huge one – comes crumbling down, it is probably because of more than one factor. Perhaps it was built on a weak foundation or suffered flood damage. Maybe the owners neglected it out of laziness or a lack of money. Just as houses can fall apart from lack of care, so can empires. But why did the Roman Empire fall? After an incredibly successful 700-year era of expansion that stretched control over most of Europe and parts of Africa and Asia (Background Essay), the Roman Empire started to disintegrate. There were many reasons for this: political instability, military mistakes, economic and civic decay, foreign invasions, and natural forces. While all of these factors, especially military mistakes and economic and civic decay, were very important, it was political instability that really brought the empire crashing down.

Military mistakes were critically important in contributing to the fall of Rome. Roman officials stopped requiring troops to wear protective gear, and they allowed too many exemptions from the draft (Doc B). Without proper body armor, the soldiers were vulnerable to attacks by skilled archers such as the Huns (Doc D). Draft exemptions let too many men off the hook. Even bakers and cooks were not required to serve (Doc B). Because of these mistakes, the Roman military became much weaker, both in the way they prepared and fought and in the number and quality of troops they had to defend and expand the empire.

The decay in the economic and civic life of Rome was the second-most important reason for the eventual fall of the empire. Wasteful extravagance of emperors, the high cost of fighting wars, and a tax system that was a huge burden for average citizens (Doc E) led to many problems in Rome, including low morale. Many citizens felt that the Roman leadership was corrupt and that they would be better off being ruled by foreign invaders (Doc E). The strain on the tax system fed the problem of inadequate military equipment; without money, the military couldn't operate effectively and the empire was made more vulnerable.

Rome might have survived these challenges – or avoided them altogether – if the men at the top ruled with consistency. The 50-year period from 235-285 CE had a devastating effect on Rome. There were 22 different emperors, at least 12 of whom were assassinated by other power-hungry officials (Doc A). When turnover at the top is so frequent and so violent, it has to have a huge ripple effect. The political stability is the solid ground on which a society stands. Weaken a government's legitimacy with assassinations and suicides and people lose confidence and respect for that government.

Although there were many key causes that led to the "fall" of the Roman Empire, it was the political instability that was the most important. It helped spark the other problems, including military mistakes and economic and civic decay that in turn led to foreign invasions (Doc C) and an inability to bounce back from natural catastrophes such as earthquakes or epidemics (Doc F). It is very likely that the cracks that developed between 235 and 285 CE caused the empire to crumble two centuries later.