

“America and Rome”

By Roger James Rietjens

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Mr. Lund

Do you like to watch movies? I do, Are you familiar with what tropes are? A trope is a device within a story to make it a good story, tropes like having the characters find a MacGuffin, or seeing a character go somewhere stupid in a horror movie. Depending on how closely you observe the media you consume you can see and identify certain tropes and even predict what will happen. How can we know that a character going into an abandoned shed in a horror movie will die? We know because we have seen it again and again in the past, in the same way, we can predict the future by looking into the past. In simple ways like if I do that thing again I will get hurt again. Or on a grander scale, by looking at the rise and fall of civilizations, and comparing it to the country we live in today. In this paper, I will endeavor to investigate the popular comparison between Rome and America. Now some of you might be thinking that America is

not an empire, and you would be correct in that assumption, we are a Democratic Republic and don't conquer land. We do however have over two hundred military bases in foreign countries, and we involve ourselves in almost every military conflict in the world. So maybe, there is more to be gained in this comparison than one might believe.

Rome, in its infantile years after gaining independence from monarchy (a small similarity), became a republic around 510 BC. They began to expand, engaging in several wars, and Julius Caesar grew to power in an age of civil unrest. Anyone familiar with Shakespeare's likewise named play knows what happens next as Julius Caesar is assassinated. Taking the throne after him is Augustus rising to power as the first emperor of Rome. This new Imperial Rome stretched from 31 BC to 476 AD, though the actual downfall is debated, 476 AD marks the end of the western roman empire (the nation had split into two halves in 286 AD), and the end of an empire operation out of the city of Rome. This is a summary of the nation's beginning and end, when abbreviated like this, it hardly seems to be important, hardly a footnote in a history textbook. But the Roman empire was a world and culture-shaping phenomenon and is the textbook modern reference for a vast military-fueled empire. I would like to touch on six main points about Rome, and the Roman world. First I would like to discuss morals, the state of mind of the average Roman, and how they treat foreigners, second I would like to discuss the religious landscape and history of Rome. Thirdly I would like to touch on the Economics of the Empire and, fourthly I want to discuss the Government of Rome and its elite class. Next, I wish to dissect the Roman military, and finally, I will touch on Rome's foreign policy (though many of these overlap so I may repeat a few things).

One of the first things to realize when discussing Roman morals is to understand how different the mind of the average Roman citizen is to us. Romans lived in what we like to call an

Honor-Shame Society, very different from what we here in America live in. To sum it up (as best as I can) in an Honor-Shame-oriented culture, the honor of your family, the honor of your tribe, your village, your city, and the honor of the nation you represent is key to success and respect. And the avoidance of shame is crucial in the process of advancing and preserving honor. To quote Cullen Murphys *Are We Rome*,

“Roman Notions of personal Honor and disgrace, and the behavior appropriate to each, have no real counterpart in America; Roman officials would unhesitatingly commit suicide in situations that wouldn’t make Americans even sit down with Barbra Walters (much less consider resigning).” (Are we Rome 17)

And they fancied themselves to be in a state of cultural and militaristic enlightenment, seeing as Rome demolished its neighbors with vast legions of elite soldiers. They viewed the world as being centered and focused around their eternal city and all outsiders are unintelligent backward barbarians. Which backfired in many stupendous ways, such as the defeat of Quintilius Varus in Germany due to underestimating the enemy and leading his troops into a German ambush and having his force utterly decimated; roughly thirty thousand Romans were tortured and killed that day. And, how did Rome respond to the news of this defeat you might wonder? Well if I may take another excerpt from Cullen Murphy’s *Are We Rome*,

“What conclusions did the Romans draw from their defeat? It’s a hoary truism that people don’t learn the lessons they most urgently ought to heed. Some Romans blamed sheer incompetence by varus, some bad weather, some a supernatural judgment. No one at the time hinted at the true explanation, the strategic premise of the disaster, which was this: the Roman disinclination either to understand the minds or to credit the capabilities of people unlike themselves.” (Are We Rome 127)

All this to say that Romans held themselves superior to all, more cultured, educated, stronger, braver, and above all blessed by the gods.

But what god in particular, and what did they do to be deserving of blessing? Well, in its infancy Rome was polytheistic (that is believing in multiple gods, for those unfamiliar with the term), with many temples built to Rome's three founding fathers, Jupiter god of all, Mars god of war, and father of Romulus and Remus, and Quirinus (formerly Romulus) Rome's first King. Most of the gods in Rome were based on or had a Greek counterpart, as the mythos of Greek settlements filtered into Rome through the people. And as Rome expanded they conquered many people of different cultures and religions. In order to establish order and unity among these people they absorbed into the empire, Rome would add their gods to their pantheon, by either claiming they worship the same god under a different name or adding them to the pantheon. In total, the Roman pantheon contained 12 main gods, like the Greek pantheon along with 67 other venerated divine beings (not all of which were taken from other civilizations like Cardea, goddess of door hinges). There were very few pantheons where this method was not carried out, with the Jews being one of those exceptions as they are monotheistic (the sister term to polytheistic, meaning they believe in one God). It was in this theological landscape that Christianity began to spread around the empire, and after facing persecution became the official state religion of Rome in 313 AD in The Edict of Milan.

But what is an empire without an economy? The strength behind vast legions, the force to erect great monuments, and the means to import exotic commodities. Rome's life as an economic producer was short indeed, as the burden of production was shouldered onto the vast lands of the sprawling Roman empire. I am not at liberty to go into vast detail on the Roman money-making methods however, I can tell you that their economy was agrarian, with a heavy helping of slaves and trading with surrounding nations. During its height, Rome was able to institute a tax called *Annona* levied on every city in the empire except Rome. the *Annona* was a tax of grain that was

used to provide free bread for most of Rome's habitants, and even later it was expanded to include free olive oil and wine, it was not an uncommon fate for a slave or criminal to spend their whole lives slaving away in the vast bakeries of the city. But I've gone off on a tangent, Wealth gaps are not a recent or modern development, we have seen them throughout history and it is no different in Rome, to quote *Are We Rome* by Cullen Murphy,

"The Roman magistrates competed with one another to endow the capital with improvements. Rome was a city with many wealthy patrons — indeed, many absurdly wealthy patrons. The class stratifications of Roman society was extreme; by comparison, Victorian England might seem a laboratory of equality. Rome's wealthiest class, the senatorial aristocracy, constituted by one estimate two thousands of one percent of the population; then came the equestrian class, with perhaps a tenth of a percent. Collectively these people owned almost everything."
(*Are We Rome* 100)

The Roman legal tender was the silver denarius, which was in use as far back as 211 BC, however, due to the rarity of silver and the size of the empire, the distribution of money was a problem, especially for the wealthy with high aspirations. So what did they do? To better spread the coin around the empire they began to dilute the purity of the silver in the coins with bronze, from 100% silver to 90% silver, to 50% silver, and continued decreasing until it was only 0.5% silver. Historians estimate that at its highest, inflation in the empire reached an all-time high of 15000% between 200 and 300 AD, which to illustrate means that one pound of gold was valued at 72,000 denarii. That is to say, Rome slowly killed itself economically, and the rulers devalued the currency to appease the people and hold up their promises.

But let's talk about these leaders. Are they strong-willed men of action, savvy businessmen, or arrogant and prideful? As we discussed earlier, the ruling class, the 0.5% (approximately) owned everything and competed for public recognition by providing improvements and commodities to Rome. Originally these people would rule together in a Roman republic, later becoming an empire, ruled primarily by One person (until decline and

power struggles where the emperor became a figurehead with next to no power, but I will not talk about that, as that would require more research). And while the emperor headed the empire (as is natural), many of the public function and welfare was shouldered onto the wealthy to quote Cullen Murphy *Are We Rome*,

“The expectation in Rome, maintained over many centuries, was that affluent citizens, as individuals rather than Taxpayers, should provide for community needs. Did the city need a new aqueduct? An emergency supply of wheat? A fountain? New roads? Baths? A stadium? A temple? Repairs to the walls? Some magistrate would surely provide it – in return, implicitly, for a measure of public power, and of course for ample public recognition. Inscriptions on countless marble fragments attest to such generosity – an early version of “brought to you by” (Are We Rome 101)

However this system carried the seeds of its own destruction, it fostered an expectation that someone else will “take care of it”, in regard to any problem. And this fostered the idea that if public services are provided publicly for the glory of the provider, why should the public pay for it? And the providers begin to think "What's in this deal for me", and how can I be benefited by helping? And this privatization of public functions spread into every aspect of government, with the story of the city of Lepcis. In the year 363 AD, the city found itself under attack by barbarians, they looked to the military presence in the area, Count Romulus for aid. However the count viewed his government position as a platform to pursue his own interests, so he demanded a payment of 4,000 camels to begin helping the city. The city refused so he withdrew and the attacks resumed in his absence. In response to this, the city sent messengers to the emperor, and he decided to dispatch a trusted aid named Palladius to investigate, along with a large sum of money to fund him in his endeavor. Upon arriving in Lepcis Palladius decided to siphon a portion of the money and keep it for himself, the count upon hearing this used this as leverage to make himself appear benevolent in the report to Rome. After this ten years went by, and under his “reign” a revolt rose up, a revolt so fierce that the emperor sent his army’s *magister militum*

to put it down. He on his way borrowed troops from a border leaving it open to attacks, which of course occurred in his absence. One in the city he removed the count from command and decimated the rebellion, and finally discovered that Palladius had lied in his report. Now imagine this way of doing business spreading Empire-wide, affecting farmers, craftsmen, shippers, and imperial magistrates and governors. And these “methods” persisted for about 200 years and you can surely imagine the effects. To take another excerpt from *Are We Rome*,

“Unit commanders are routinely sending inflated rosters to headquarters for payment on the basis of headcount, keeping the difference for themselves. Soldiers are allowed to leave and then disperse into the populace, but are kept on the rosters. The on-paper size of the army is vast; the true size is smaller – and in fact unknowable.”(*Are We Rome* 108)

But now let's talk about that army, the might of Rome, of disciplined legions, and the vast territory they have to protect. The Roman legions were a well-disciplined machine that decimated rival nations, and barbarians on the battlefield with only a few exceptions (like Hannibal's war elephants). The Roman fighting force was subject to constant drills to remain combat-ready at all times, even in the quiet far-flung corners of the empire to take an excerpt from a military handbook from the second century AD,

“Trained by sweating, puffing, and panting, exposed to summer heat and bitter cold under an open sky the soldiers became accustomed to the future hardship of real fighting.” (*Are We Rome* 69 - 70)

And yet another historical observation of Roman conditioning from the Roman Jewish historian Josephus in the first century AD,

“One would not be wrong in saying that their maneuvers are like bloodless battles, and their battles bloodstained maneuvers.” (*Are We Rome* 70)

Roman soldiers enforced the Pax Romana or The Roman Peace across the empire from uniform disciplined forts or stationed in cities. For those unfamiliar, the Pax Romana is different from normal peace, in that there were many rebellions during that time, and general unrest. It was peaceful because anyone stepping out of line was slaughtered or crucified as an example of “break the rules and this will happen to you”.

However, as we just recently discussed the legions near the end went through a serious change, in fact, they went through many changes, most of which were detrimental to their presence and dominance. As previously mentioned Rome began to struggle to pay for the size of their empire and a large part of that is the ridiculous sum they spend annually on its military, however as Rome rested on the laurels of its success it became decadent, and many Romans no longer wished to be a part of the legion, and so it came to be that the currency Rome's military hungered for was manpower. And so to remedy this they allowed immigrating barbarians to become part of the military to fill out the ranks, these troops were known as *foederati*. However to be a part of the military the barbarians did not want to be held to the strict Roman standard, and so through slight concessions slowly, step by step the Roman legions degraded constant training ceased, and drilling in armor became a thing of the past Roman military writer Vegetius describes the consequences of this when he wrote,

“But when, because of negligence and laziness, parade ground drills were abandoned, the customary armor began to seem heavy since the soldiers rarely ever wore it. Therefore they first asked the emperor to set aside the breastplates and mail and then the helmets. So our soldiers fought the Goths without any protection for chest and head and were often beaten by archers. Although there were many disasters, which led to the loss of great cities, no one tried to restore breastplates and helmets to the infantry.” (Are We Rome 89)

And so not only the quality of the troops declined but their ranks grew thinner and were run by greedy commanders as we discussed earlier. Despite this, Romans behaved and believed

themselves to be better than all who surrounded them (even commissioning the minting of coins with the inscription “Rome unconquered” while the Visigoths moved on to the capitol). Is it any wonder that the rest of the world viewed the Romans in a bad light?

They spoke loudly of freedom, those under the sway of Rome would disagree, however, for liberty was primarily for the children of Rome. They publicly shamed the leaders who sought to rise against them, and their messengers spoke contemptuously to foreigners, even royalty was expected to bend the knee for the least of the Roman citizens in imperial matters. As I mentioned earlier Romans considered themselves superior to everyone, however, Cicero attempted to emphasize the good qualities of non-Romans, (*Are We Rome* 136)

“Spaniards had the advantage over them in point of numbers, Gauls in physical strength, Carthaginians in sharpness, Greeks in culture, native Latins and Italians in shrewd common sense; yet Rome had conquered them all and acquired her vast empire because of piety, religion, and appreciation of the omnipotence of the gods she was without equal.”

Rome believed it to be the center of the world, the greatest of all mortal cities, nay rather an Eternal City. In all their maps they had Rome in the center and their territory was measured by how far away from Rome it was. And yet their city was not eternal and the great Roman empire spanning nearly 1000 years, came to an end.

In this paper I mean to convince you that America, has declined like Rome. There are many parallels in history and I believe much can be gleaned of the future by delving into our past, to quote Mark Twain, *“History Does Not Repeat Itself, But It Rhymes”*. I hope to show you that America has declined in economics, government, religion, morals, and in our military and the way we interact with the world. To clarify by decline I am referring to a general loss of quality, stability, or competence.

We are all truly blessed to be living in one of if not the wealthiest nation in history, our influence and culture touch almost every part of the globe. And we are governed by a government using the longest-surviving charter of government in the world. Now some of you may be asking how has our Government fallen, it's still in operation, and on the world stage we are still the Top dog, a superpower, and for that matter how could a superpower have a bad economy?

Well in the matter of economics, we are indeed suffering from inflation, however not to the extreme height that the Romans had, we have something entirely different to worry about deficit spending and the national debt. To quote Cal Thomas' *Americas Expiration Date*,

"America is headed for foreclosure. We are drowning in financial debt and submerged under an immortal tsunami. At the end of 2018, the US national debt was approaching \$22 trillion, and the deficit was at \$985 billion. Both are growing. These are unstable numbers. If not addressed, they will lead us ultimately into bankruptcy and possibly another depression." (Americas Expiration Date 144)

Now I don't claim to be a great entrepreneur or an economist, all I can point out is that the US has spent 3.15 trillion dollars this year alone, a quantity that far exceeds the 2.05 trillion we have collected this year. This is not a stand-alone instance, but rather a trend, and the cause of the US debt that as of this year exceeds 31 trillion (not including unfunded liabilities like social security), a large increase from its inception where it began as a measly (in comparison) 75 million. And I would argue, if you permit me that a nation cannot survive spending more than it produces forever. It would be foolish to forever rely on printing your way to prosperity, you would be doomed to fail.

When you think of the United state of America's Government, do you think of the founding fathers standing stoically fighting the British, perhaps you think of our flying colors and the majestic bald eagle, soaring overhead? Or maybe you adopt a more pessimistic view, of

government thinking of Nixon and the Watergate scandal, the decline in the quality of presidential debates, and the massive libraries of laws we have produced, such that the average person breaks 3 federal laws a day. In any case, it would be foolish to think nothing has changed. America, much like our Roman predecessor, gives out government functions to private companies, to Quote Cullen Murphys *Are We Rome*,

“Government on its stupendous modern scale — regulating every industry; redistributing treasure from one sector to another; forecasting the weather and engineering the genome; reaching bureaucratic into every intimate cranny of life — simply did not exist in ancient Rome. because the extent of government is larger, privatization has more scope. Its most pervasive form is perfectly legal: the hiring of profit-making companies by the thousands to do government jobs, and sometimes the wholesale reflagging of government agencies into private or semi-private companies. The ostensible motives may be pure, but the effect in every case is to insert an independent agent, with its own interests to consider and protect, into the space between public will and public outcome — a dynamic that represents a potential “diverting of government force” far more sympathetic and insidious than outright venality.” (Are We Rome pg 110)

Do you remember the tale of the city of Lepcis? I spoke of it earlier. Would you be surprised that there is a similar modern counterpart? Well, After the war in Iraq, the United States government sought to rebuild the country after the war, so the US sent 57 billion dollars over to private companies to help the country. To quote the Atlantic,

“The agencies formally charged with dispensing foreign aid -- the State Department and the Agency for International Development -- played only a minor role in these accounting shortfalls, because they spent less than a fifth of the reconstruction funds.”

But privatization hasn't just affected the rebuilding of Iraq, it has affected everything from national security to mercenary groups. To once again cite *Are We Rome*,

“Sociologists have a term for what is occurring: they call it the “externalization of state functions.” water and sewage systems are being privatized, and public hospitals and public health programs. Voucher Programs and charter schools are a way of shifting education toward the private sector. The protection of nuclear waste is in private hands. Meat inspection is largely by the meatpacking companies themselves. Americans were up in arms when they learned that Dubai

Ports, a company in the United Arab Emirates, would soon be in control of the terminals at half a dozen major U.S. seaports — only to discover that terminal operations at virtually all American ports had long ago been privatized, and that 80 percent of them were already operated by foreign companies, the largest of which is Chinese.” (Are We Rome pg 114)

One final note on government, Rome believed itself to be the center of the world, in the favor of God, of higher obligation and privilege. We here in America believe ourselves to be the city on a hill, free and filled with virtue, and we enforce virtue and have taken it upon ourselves to be the policemen of the world. To quote Ronald Regan,

“..But I am equally confident that America will overcome any challenge, from Communist China to the terrorist regime in Tehran. Because that’s what free people do. We come together; we solve problems; we win, they lose; and we execute our foreign policy confident that we are that shining city on a hill.”

Now if you would permit, I will begin this next section with a quote from Cal Thomas’ *America's expiration date*

“Whenever I hear the song “God Bless America” sung at baseball games and patriotic events, I ask myself, Why should he? Like ancient Israel - the only nation ever to enjoy a covenant relationship with God - which was exiled because of its unfaithfulness to God and his requirements, America doesn’t seem to be doing much that would find favor in God’s sight.”

When we established ourselves as a nation we said that we hold certain truths to be self-evident that every man is created equal and that to secure these rights the people created for themselves a government, and that in the event of said government obstructing these rights, the people are within their rights to abolish it. A truly noble conviction, founded by borrowing ideas from religion, mainly the moral ideas about humans. So how has this edict stood up to the sands of time, how has America held up morally?

Much like ancient Rome, we have nationalized regular abortions available to anyone. In Fact, the cumulative total number of abortions reached over 60 million when counted in 2019, this is a staggering amount, around six times the amount of deaths from the holocaust, a staggering total of 11 million casualties, 6 million Jewish and 5 million others. When the Supreme Court decided to strike down laws prohibiting abortion in 1973 the value attributed to human life continued to be questioned, when does a fetus become a baby with the right to life, who gives life value, and are humans intentionally created by a creator or merely the byproduct of random chance? With greater advances in technology, we can see into the womb with greater clarity than ever before, and yet we let the baby's life have only the value assigned to it by the mother. There have been offers to help these mothers who would be unready or victims of rape, more than three thousand pregnancy centers have sprung up across America since the overturn of *Roe V. Wade*. These centers have saved thousands of babies, brought countless people to the Christian faith, and offer these services for free during and after pregnancy to help the mothers, unlike abortion clinics which charge for their services. And in the case of the child not being wanted, there are many adoption homes willing to look after the child. To take an excerpt from one of Emperor Augustus' speech,

“All other crimes put together cou'd not equalize theirs: For they were guilty of murder, not in suffering those to be born, which should proceed from 'em; of Impiety, in causing the Names and honors of their ancestors to cease; and of sacrilege, in destroying their kind, which proceed from immortal gods, and Human Nature, the principal thing consecrated to 'em. Therefore, in that respect they dissolved the Government, in disobeying its laws; betrayed their Country, by making it Barren and Waste; nay demolished the City, in depriving it of inhabitants,” (The Fate of Empires, By Arthur John Hubbard 105)

Despite this Progressive pro-abortion activists focus on the choice that the mother has to shift attention away from what is being chosen to begin with, and so we allow humans to decide

the value of human rights, where are these truths that we hold to be self-evident now? And how are the rights of the babies upheld?

As a nation we have been steadily wearing down what we consider gender and sexual norms, to our detriment I fear, we are forever subject to revolution against oppression that is not as extreme as depicted. This is clearly embodied in the lgbtqia+ and transgender movements, claiming that trans people are not heard or accepted even though only 38% of our society holds to the claim that we have gone too far in accepting trans people, parallel to that 36% of Americans claim that society has not gone far enough. And if this is not enough acceptance our schools and social circles glorify transitioning with many schools making children think they need to change genders and rushing them into undergoing the surgery against the parent's wills. And when faced with opposition to their ideas they seek to hold back or cancel those with different opinions. Something like this is relatively new, and has no parallel in ancient Rome, as it would be considered silliness. On August 28th, 2022 a 'kid friendly' drag queen show was advertised as g rated. Conservative members of the community were barred from entering by groups of combat-armored Antifa (anti-fascist) members, who also went around telling various progressive protesters to not talk to interviewers, despite this undercover reporters entered the restaurant. Within the 8 or so children were exposed to hypersexualized drag queens who are men who dress scantily and effeminately. This in tandem with the booming pornography industry shows the depravity we have begun to fall into, much like the Romans.

The devaluing of sex has always been a thing, from the Roman days to today prostitution and similarly, obscene things have been around. The man who is commonly blamed for making America to be "slouching to Gomorrah" is Hugh Hefner the founder of the infamous Playboy magazine and author of the Playboy philosophy. In 2017 after his death, he was called a general

in what came to be known as the sexual revolution. His legacy (or curse depending on who you ask) ruined lives, destroyed homes and lives on in the multi-billion dollar pornography industry that thrives today. He created a way of thinking that divorced love from sex, which he admitted later in life brought him no happiness. Yet today there are 1.3 million porn websites, only 3% of which require verification of adulthood, and the average American child begins consuming porn at the age of 11. According to Comscore media share in August of 2015, internet users viewed 15 billion pages of adult content. I don't have time to research in depth the destructive effect this had on people's mental health and physical health, namely the creation of new STDs.

But what of the religious landscape of America? There was a time when the Christian faith was held in esteem in America, though not followed by many they respected churches and people of the faith. This stuck with the media for a while, an example of which is the original *Ghostbusters*, an obviously non-Christian film, yet when the giant monster steps on a church one of the characters says the line “Nobody steps on a church in my town” which shows the fact that people still somewhat cared for it. Yet media depictions and public regard have gone downhill, they are often displayed as ignorant, hypocritical, and intolerant, yet rarely effort is given to show the benefit and good of Christianity. And while the media is not necessarily indicative of public opinion it certainly can affect it, because stories have power.

While other religions have coexisted with Christianity in the past, never before has Christianity had to coexist with a regulated church of Satan. Originally founded in the 1960s in America by LaVey, a former carnival worker, the church of Satan is certainly not a new thing. The church of Satan is not really worshiping Satan as an entity, at least not knowingly, to quote their website,

“We are the first above-ground organization in history openly dedicated to the acceptance of Man’s true nature—that of a carnal beast, living in a cosmos that is

indifferent to our existence. To us, Satan is the symbol that best suits the nature of we who are carnal by birth—people who feel no battles raging between our thoughts and feelings, we who do not embrace the concept of a soul imprisoned in a body. He represents pride, liberty, and individualism—qualities often defined as Evil by those who worship external deities, who feel there is a war between their minds and emotions.”

Even though they claim to not worship the supernatural, they still claim to be a religion, perform rituals and seek to gather followers in other nations, by creating “churches” there.

And if I am to make one last point, let me quote once again Cal Thomas’ *American expiration date*,

“Why do so many self-declared Christians think God is only active when someone they voted for (mostly Republicans) is elevated? Evangelist Franklin Graham said, “God showed up” when Donald Trump was elected president in 2016. So where was God when Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, Lyndon Johnson, and John Kenedy were elected, just to name some modern democrats? Was he on holiday?”

God is not a genie who magically does what you command him to do, nor does becoming a Christian promise you success in every aspect of life, but this highlights a deeper issue. In a survey in 2021, it was found that 176 million Americans claim to be Christians—69% of the population. Yet, only 6% of U.S. adults—which is 9% of those identifying as Christians—possess a biblical worldview, believing the Bible to be accurate and reliable. A sad statistic indeed, so now I ask once again, should God bless America, I should hope you now see that there might be a reason for him to withhold his blessing

Great empires are remembered in many ways, from culture to science, but also in how they interact with other nations. Whether they spread their empire to others by trade and diplomacy or whether they meet them at the end of a sword. To quote Cullen Murphys *Are We Rome* (64 - 65),

“No comparison involving Rome and America receives more attention or is more frequently invoked than the military comparison. America’s “seemingly imperial power,” in the words of the Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye, “is more dominant perhaps than any other since the Roman Empire.”” (Are We Rome 64 - 65)

So has our military really declined? And how does Rome tie into this comparison? Well to begin with let me say that I am in no way trying to disrespect the armed forces of our country, nor would I mean to say we are defenseless, I mean simply to point out historical trends. So do you, dear reader, remember Rome lowered the standards of its army, and slowly over time they lost effectiveness? Well, to quote Cullen Murphy’s *Are We Rome*,

“Officially, U.S. military doctrine calls for the ability to fight two large conventional conflicts at once – a capability that the Pentagon acknowledges America no longer possesses.”

Rome as its need for military grew squeezed their coffers for the military fund, often devaluing their currency to finish the bill. However, there was one resource the emperor could not conjure into existence, manpower. And here in America, we see that as well, to quote military.com,

“A new study from the Pentagon shows that 77% of young Americans would not qualify for military service without a waiver due to being overweight, using drugs or having mental and physical health problems.”

When faced with this challenge one asks, how will the U.S. deal with this problem? Well, Cullen believes there to be two possible ways. The first is by creating more indigenous troops, through wellness programs or some other means. And the second is by Recruiting foreigners into the military. The first method was attempted in the Vietnam War called, project 100,000, the military recruited from the pool of category IV recruits. These recruits were the ones who scored

lowest in the armed forces qualification test, this plan succeeded in one way, it put more boots on the ground, however in every other regard it was a complete and utter failure, to quote *Are We Rome*,

“The New Standards men were unfit for many specialties and therefore assigned to the infantry, making them far more likely than other recruits to die in combat, performance was subpar in every way. They took longer to train. They were arrested more frequently. And once outside the military, their lives were no different from those of their peers who had never been in the service.” (Are We Rome 85)

While this scared us away from taking drastic leaps for a while, the standard, like in Rome continued to drop, as stated in an excerpt from *Are We Rome*,

*“To lower the bar for new enlistees even further, the military has softened its educational requirements. In 2005 the military accepted more recruits without high school diplomas than it had in years, and it also accepted more category IV recruits. In addition, the military has eased the ban on tattoos, relaxed its drug-testing policies, and waived the obesity cutoff if the recruit can pass a somewhat forgiving fitness test. One recruiting officer explains, “There’s just a lot of kids sitting around playing Xbox and eating junk food.” Niall Ferguson writes in *The Colossus* that “The white man’s burden is around his waist.”” (Are We Rome 85)*

To jump back to Rome, the *Foederati* were barbarians conscripted into the military, however, they ultimately contributed to Rome's fall, by leaving their ranks to join the Visigoths, led by Alaric, in destroying Rome. they were more like mercenaries than soldiers in the end changing sides for the looting gained in destroying Rome. This as well has modern-day parallel groups of independent soldiers operating under different rules, perhaps the best example of which is Blackwater, a private security firm where in the spring of 2006 the vice chairman, Cofer Black, a former counterterrorism chief addressed a meeting of the Special Operations Forces Exhibition and Conference, where he, in essence, put his company at America’s (or someone else's) disposal as an army for hire. To quote *Are We Rome*,

“” It's an intriguing, good idea from a practical standpoint because we're low-cost and fast” Black explained. He went on sounding the plaintive note one might have heard from Alaric: “The issue is, Who's going to let us play on their team?”” (Are We Rome 90)

But what about how America interacts with the world around us? We as a nation shoulder the burden of enforcing justice in myriad places around the world, in a sense we are the policemen of the world. This is a big difference between us and Rome. In Rome, a leader would be considered weak if they didn't go forth and conquer land or improve the empire in some way. In America, we do not operate or think this way. I have one final point to make: America, like Rome, has high Immigration rates, causing a strain on resources, due to the vast amount of illegal crossings. However this is an indication of something else, to quote Chal Thomas' *Americas Expiration Date*,

“Sir John found patterns, or stages, in the rise and fall of great nations. He called them the age of pioneers, the age of conquests, the age of affluence, the age of intellect, and finally the age of decadence” (Americas Expiration Date 19)

John lists several characteristics of the age of decadence: defensiveness, pessimism, materialism, frivolity, an influx of foreigners too great to be assimilated properly, and A weakening of religion. Hopefully, you can see how all of these characteristics are displayed in our society and that we have declined. We have changed our morals and religion, our economy is headed down a dark road, our military is struggling for manpower, and we find ourselves being flooded with more people than we are equipped to assimilate.

The one objection I have encountered a lot in my research is that we cannot learn from the past, there are too many differences in situations to say this thing now will be like this thing then. In a certain sense, I agree that if I were to see a meteor fall to the ground and then look at a

leaf and say these two are alike because they both fall to the ground I would be wrong. But, to continue the analogy I would be well within common sense to see the two fall and suppose that they are both affected by gravity and are pulled to the ground. This is what I am saying about America and Rome, they are not the same, as I already said they are different in wage gap, mental composition, location, language, and size. However they follow similar trends and all large empires are acted upon by similar forces, and forced to confront similar issues, although there is more variety in what issues they face. This whole argument calls to mind a bible verse, Ecclesiastes 1:9,

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”

Solomon was the wisest man to live on the face of the earth, after being blessed by God. In this verse he is saying that as time goes on things may have the appearance of being new, but in reality they are the the same things, a sentiment that resonates with Mark Twain saying that *“History Does Not Repeat Itself, But It Rhymes”*

So all that said, what should we do? Or rather what can we do? Well to be blunt I don't know, there is no magic solution to make every problem go away that I can conceive of. The issue of nations and the flow of history is most likely an issue bigger than any of our ability to change. In times of worry and tribulation I think it a good idea to turn to the good book, John 16:33 says,

“I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world, you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world.”

We should not be consumed by worry, for in God we are saved, after all as Job 12:23 says

“He makes nations rise and then fall, builds up some, and abandons others.” And it is ultimately up to you to decide where you will put your efforts and labor, in a kingdom that will pass away, or in the eternal kingdom of heaven. We are not Rome, we are different in many ways, yet we are similar in many ways too. So what I would encourage you to do is, strive to live for the lord, minister to people whether through words or example and hold fast to the teachings of the scripture, and be comforted, knowing that in God we are saved.

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