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We Are Not the Romans . . . YET

Tom Leamy

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For the past decade and beyond, the United States has faced many trials and tribulations that have shaken our great country. Recent events have roused the question of the possibility that the United States may be in the same position as the Roman Empire was near the fall of the Empire in the West during the latter part of the fifth century.

Today, major crises beset America at every turn. We have a generation that does not seem to be aware of the issues we face as a country. Many are blindly obsessed with the self-indulgence that we call social media, a pop culture that litters young minds with superficial nonsense, and a distorted view of the real world. The result is a lackadaisical attitude about the state of our nation. In fact, for many folks across the United States, being a patriot is now considered racist! When did being proud to be an American become offensive? Given that many people who live in America despise this great country, it is easy to see why apathy has grabbed hold of us. Will this trend continue? Only time will tell.

The average citizen of the Western Roman Empire in the late fifth century could have never imagined their Empire falling, let alone its altogether elimination. Rome had faced so many crises and yet emerged stronger. Why would anyone think the problems of the fifth century would be any different? The Romans had faced similar problems in the third century AD when their world began to crumble, and yet they emerged ever victorious.

The northern frontier of the Empire had always been restless for the Romans. Their enemies were the amalgamation of German tribes who wished to settle in a more desirable land that the Roman Empire controlled. The Romans built extensive fortifications to denote the border between the Empire and those they considered barbarians. This stemmed from the failure of the Romans to conquer the German tribes that annihilated three legions in 9 AD at the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. This forever altered the relationship between the Romans and their northern neighbors. As a result, the Romans would abandon all hope of ever conquering the German tribesmen and they decided to build forts to mark this

boundary. These fortifications became known as the *Limes* and were effective for approximately four hundred years. The fortifications were located along the Danube River from Bavaria to the Black Sea. Those same German tribes, whom the Romans could not conquer, would be the forces that would finally bring down the Empire in the West.

From 92 BC to 62 AD, the Roman and Persian empires disputed the borders of the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. With the fall of the Parthian Empire in the first years of the third century AD to the Sassanid Persians, the equation changed. The son of Sasan, Shapur, who titled himself King of Kings, had decided to re-establish the glory of Persia in the East at the expense of the Romans. During this time, Rome was fighting its civil wars and did not have the dynamic leadership from their Emperors to combat this new Persian threat.

With pressure on the northern and eastern frontiers, the Romans then faced outright revolts in different regions throughout their Empire. In the years 265-270 AD, they faced the realization that their empire was defeated. The Palmyrene Empire broke away from the Romans in the East while Gaul and Germany chose their own emperor in the West. With all these problems, the Roman Empire appeared to be doomed and yet within five years the Emperor Aurelian put it all back together. He proclaimed himself “restorer of the world” and did just that. Aurelian was rewarded with assassination in 275 AD, but he had accomplished what seemed impossible just a few years before—he saved the Western Roman Empire.

The questions arise: What made the fifth century so different from the third and why did the Romans fail? Are Americans the Romans of the third or fifth century and, with the right leadership, is it possible to put America back on the right track? What problems does America face today? We are in economic turmoil with our GDP stagnant, unemployment consistently high, if the true number is considered, which includes citizens who have stopped looking for work and given up. The U.S. national debt is an unimaginable almost twenty trillion dollars and yet we keep borrowing money. Will this finally doom the United States?

I believe we need a very strong course correction soon or we will become the Romans of the fifth century. That said, the United States can rebound. Our economy can come roaring back if we return to sound economic theory. The current administration does not seem to understand economics and the leaders in Washington refuse to work together. Both the Democrats and Republicans are only concerned with winning. What are they winning? I would dearly love to know. They posture, argue, and obfuscate all the problems of today and refuse to compromise. In fact, the art of compromise is lost on our society. Consider the

definition of “compromise”—an agreement or a settlement of a dispute that is reached by each side making concessions. Since when do the Democrats or the Republicans want to give even an inch? The mechanics of our system of government dictate that there must be compromise or the entire system stalls and fails. America must face its problems right now or they will become too severe to overcome. The one key element we are missing in the United States today is leadership. Leadership requires putting the needs of the country ahead of one’s personal ideology. This brand of leadership is sadly lacking in our federal, state, and local governments. With so many scandals such as Benghazi, and the IRS and the NSA targeting certain specific reporters facing Washington and many more throughout every state, when will true leaders emerge? The latest issue involving the Syrian refugees is frightening, and when people question this policy they are attacked and labeled heartless bigots.

We must ask ourselves, then, how the Romans recovered their empire in the third century. It was through leadership and the belief that all problems have solutions. Why did the Western Roman Empire fall in the fifth century? Let us examine that story now.

In many ways, the citizens of Rome gave up and surrendered to the horrific circumstances of the time. The Romans became so obsessed with their own pursuits, such as excessive leisure time and the accumulation of wealth; they began hiring mercenaries to do their fighting for them. All these factors were an albatross around the neck of the Empire in the West.

In addition, the average Roman aristocratic family, who had always served the empire loyally and well, began to have their sons cut off their thumbs, thus making them ineligible to serve in the legions. This was devastating and many of the aristocrats and well-off citizens of the empire simply did not have the political will to defend that which they had previously gained. The Roman economy had stopped expanding because there was no further land to conquer, “bread and circuses”—that in modern times is known as the welfare state—grew, and the Romans debased their coinage. The entire Roman system of government was corrupt. The assassination of a Roman Emperor was commonplace and considered the rule, rather than the exception. Within fifty years, during the fifth century AD in the Western Empire, twenty nine emperors ruled, which is not conducive to a sound and reliable government.

The aforementioned factors ended the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Historians have set a date of 476 AD, but for many others and me, Rome was doomed by its circumstances a generation before. Regardless of when Rome fell, it is important to note the outcome. The Romans, who ruled the world for over a

thousand years, were overcome and eventually defeated. Now to the main question of this essay: is America the Rome of the third or fifth century?

I firmly believe America can be saved from economic and financial ruin. My hope lies in the average citizen who is proud to be from this great country and does not subscribe to the notion that our country is the source of all the world's problems. America has done more good over the span of our existence than every other nation ever conceived of in the history of this planet. America is certainly not perfect, but our system of government and economy has led to the greatest happiness for most people than anywhere else in the world. As evidence, I use the eye test that I learned in the military long ago. If America is so bad and such an evil place, why does everyone around the world strive to come here? People wish to come here to enjoy the freedoms that many of our citizens take for granted, and the lifestyle that we have strived so hard to build.

The next ten years will decide which direction this nation will take. Will we continue to borrow money at an exorbitant rate? Reader, are you aware that in the five minutes that it took you to read this article, the U.S. Government has borrowed approximately thirty five million dollars? For every one minute, the U.S. Government borrows seven million dollars. This trend is madness and must stop!

I also see hope in our fine military, which sets the standard for excellence around the world. We are still the world's lone superpower but how long can we keep our position with such a weak economy? Other nations are on the rise but have discovered that our system is the most successful. Nations like China, South Korea, and Hong Kong have duplicated our system and have seen growth in their economies like never before. Why do we continue to implement a failed socialistic experiment that is now failing miserably in Europe? This makes no coherent sense. It is time that all Americans, regardless of gender, color, or creed, stand up united and bellow, "stop the madness" and let's fix our problems.

If the Romans were able to recover in the third century, so can we. Either we will recover or we will fall victim to the fate of the Romans and fade into the obscurity of history. I for one remain optimistic and know that America can return to her days of glory for one and for all!

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