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Ancient Rome Did Not Fall: Why Real Story is Even Scarier for America and How It Connects to Billionaires



“An able Goth wants to be like a Roman” was a Goth saying that applied to Theodoric The Great, who continued Roman rule and allied himself with the Eastern Empire.

Note: This story is an update from one that generated 50,000 fans in Medium in April, with added information on the Trump conspiracy and the role of billionaires.

Many who argue that America is in decline like to point to a perceived parallel with the decline of Rome, where citizens went from ruling the world to surviving by



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The alleged script goes like this: After a series of remarkable conquests, when Rome ruled the world, it came to rely on 'foreign' armies for its power. These armies killed Rome.

Only it didn't. It didn't fall at all. And that is the more serious comparison with America. The Western Roman Empire declined gently into insignificance. It did not fall; it faded.



Attila the Hun

The Huns were horse warriors of central Asia; an early version of the fearsome Mongol tribes. They learned horsemanship at age three when their faces were cut with a sword to teach them to endure pain. To create a fearsome appearance they put binders on their children's heads, which gradually deformed their skulls and gave them a menacing look. They swept into Europe and crushed the Germanic tribes, the Goths, by 400 AD.

By 451, they had an immense army gathered on the plains of France at Chalons, east of Paris, facing the Romans. The Visigoths, or Western Goths, were allied with the Romans under their general Aetius. Three invincible armies, churning up the dust. It was Game of Thrones, Master Class.



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The Roman legions and their allies the Visigoths stop the Huns at Chalons

The battle — called the “bloodiest battle in history” — raged all day and into the night. The Huns were driven back by the wings of the Roman army, with the Visigoths in pursuit. King Theodoric I of the Visigoths was slain, but instead of disheartening the Visigoths, it infuriated them. Before the enraged Huns could be overrun Attila managed to reach his baggage train and used the wagons to save himself. It was the bloodiest battle of the ancient world. Attila later died in northern Italy, of a nosebleed. How the mighty fall.

Rome did not fall by conquest. It was instead sacked ten years later by Rome’s *allies* the Visigoths under king Alaric, who was infuriated by a failed Roman assassination attempt. Alaric was chivalrous with the inhabitants and treated them kindly.

Emperor after emperor scrambled to gather the reins of power. In 476 AD, Visigoth commander Odoacer forced the teenaged Western Roman emperor Romulus Augustus to resign his office. After that, the **Visigoths rekindled the glory of Rome**: “The Senate continued to meet just as it had for nearly a millennium. Latin remained the language of administration. Roman law governed the land. Roman armies continued to fight and win victories on the frontiers. And Roman emperors appeared on the coins that Odoacer minted.” (Edward Watts).



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The boy-king Romulus Augustus resigns his crown to Flavius Odoacre the Visigoth, who in turn gave way to Theodoric The Great

So why does everyone think that Rome fell in 476?

Because of a propaganda campaign launched by the Eastern Roman Empire!

The fabrication was woven in Constantinople by Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian, to give him an excuse to attack Italy. This he did in 535, and his troops entered Rome in 536.

He struggled to keep his possession. Italian wars did not conclude until 562 after the Goths had recaptured Rome four times. It was in one of these sieges that residents of the city survived by eating weeds and mice. It is estimated that Rome's population fell from perhaps 500,000 in the mid-5th century — the largest city in the world — to as little as 25,000 in the 560s.

Rome did not fall. It faded under the pressure of a propaganda campaign. From within, in a sense.



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the citizens of Constantinople. They were Roman.

The propaganda campaign launched by one Roman against another justified a war that killed hundreds of thousands and destroyed the prosperity that had once unified the continent of Europe.

It is notable that the Eastern Roman Empire itself did not fall until 1453, shortly before Columbus discovered America in 1492. If you count the Viking discovery of America in 1021, the Roman Empire still thrived for 500 years after America was discovered. In a sense, **the Roman world extended into our own time**. In its extent and impact, it has been the most amazing and successful empire the world has ever known.

But it extinguished the better part of itself when it lied to conquer...when political goals subverted the truth. If media are driven by profit or a lust for power, for example, are they likely to tell the truth? Or to tell an enriching lie.

Today the nations with media that have well-funded public broadcasters — Norway, Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand, Finland, Ireland, Canada, Denmark, Australia, Germany, UK, Uruguay — are very strong democracies. The U.S. has CPB, PBS and NPR, but their public audience share is only 2%, and the degree of funding granted is tiny. If you want to survive, you need to agree that well-funded and institutionally secure public media can enhance public engagement with political processes, as a crucial dimension of any “virtuous circle” relationship between public media and their democracies.

Rome stopped being a nation the moment its elements and its rulers turned upon themselves. And this is the real lesson for America: You are not likely to perish from outside enemies, but from your own politicians spinning a story for their own gain.

There is a score that measures countries the scale from full dictatorship to fully democratic, from -10 to +10 (highest democracy). The last time America was an anocracy was between 1797 and 1800, when it was rated a +5, mostly for its limited political competitiveness (the Federalists had dominated government since their party's inception in the 1790s). America's polity ranking increased to +6 in March



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guaranteed for all citizens.

In 2019, after Trump refused to cooperate with Congress, especially during its impeachment inquiry, America's democracy score dropped to a +7. Trump sowed distrust in the election by undermining voting by mail. He then questioned the peaceful transfer of power, a hallmark of American democracy, and attempted to overturn the results of the election. This led to America's polity score dropping from a +7 to a +5, the lowest score since 1800.

Donald Trump pushed the United States into becoming an anocracy for the first time in more than two hundred years.

We are no longer the world's oldest continuous democracy. That honor is now held by Switzerland, followed by New Zealand, and then Canada. We are no longer a peer to nations like Canada, Costa Rica, and Japan, which are all rated a +10 on the polity index.

Social media algorithms — and Trump's rapid-fire tweeting — have reinforced the sense of aggrievement among white conservatives. This is what makes Elon Musk's purchase of Twitter so dangerous, and why Reagan's overthrow of the fair reporting act that led to Fox News was such a disaster.

Half of white Americans could be categorized as racially resentful — and it's not the desperately poor who start civil wars, but *those who once had privilege and feel they are losing status*.

The most powerful determinant of violence is the trajectory of a group's political status. People were especially likely to fight if they had once held power and saw it slipping away. Human beings are loss averse. They are much more motivated to try to reclaim losses than they are to try to make gains.

This is particularly virulent in the "Dregs of Dixie" — the states that formed the old Confederacy, which spawned the White Evangelicals, who became today's Republican base.

An accelerant is the growing inequality in American wealth. Robert Reich observes



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A partial democracy is three times as likely to experience civil war as a full democracy.

But if you can hold onto the larger version of America, there is no reason why you should not surpass that Roman record.

You have landed on the Moon; you have enriched the world. Keep thinking big, and your systems will unite the planet yet.

America is on the verge of cheering a world that has entered democracy and prosperity using its example; America is about to win. Don't let the passing rustle of bad news mislead you — there is a spectacular *global* trend showing a decline in poverty, famine and disease.

But to be there when it happens, something serious has to change in America. Right now, you are probably paying more in taxes that the guy with the \$175-million house and his own rocket ship company.

More than George Soros, whose wealth is estimated at \$6.7-billion, and who paid no federal income tax for three years in a row. He invests in charities...of his own choosing.

More than Warren Buffet, the world's fifth richest person, who paid minimal taxes.

You are a better decision-maker than Jeff Bezos, who fires 99,000 human beings and then announces plans to give most of his \$193-billion fortune to charity. No one is against charity, but should that much money be directed on one person's whims? Do those whims include helping the people he fired? He was concerned that Amazon has had three quarters of (only) single-digit revenue growth. Jeff Bezos has a \$500,000,000 yacht.

Elon Musk dropped \$600-billion in Tesla share prices (thus far), then bought Twitter, fired half the staff, and allowed pranksters to run wild. A single unmanaged tweet about Eli Lilly giving away insulin for free, sparked a \$15-billion drop in the share price of the drug company. Insulin, of course, was once almost free.

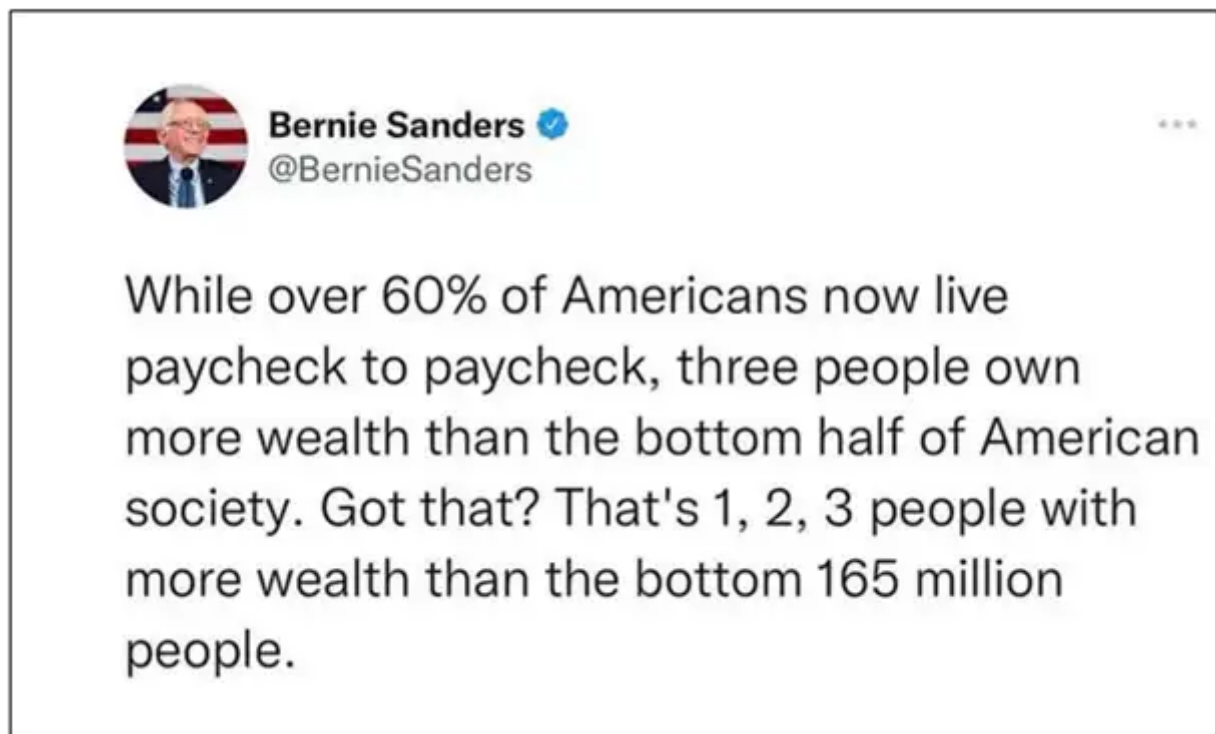


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the recent federal election. It wasn't to protect your interests.

During the same period, you as a middle-class wage earner in your early 40s expanded your net worth by roughly \$65,000, mostly due to the rise in value of your home, while paying almost \$62,000 in taxes.

You and the 14 million Americans whose net worths combined equal that of the top 25, paid the government **\$143 billion**.



To last as long as Rome lasted, America needs a serious economic system that would be the envy of nations around the world.

For everyone. Not for a box of billionaires.

It's what democracy and self-rule is all about.

America will not be destroyed by external barbarians; it can only fall to internal barbarians, who care only for themselves.

And if American can get a grip on that threat, there is no reason to think that it will





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And the year 4000.

