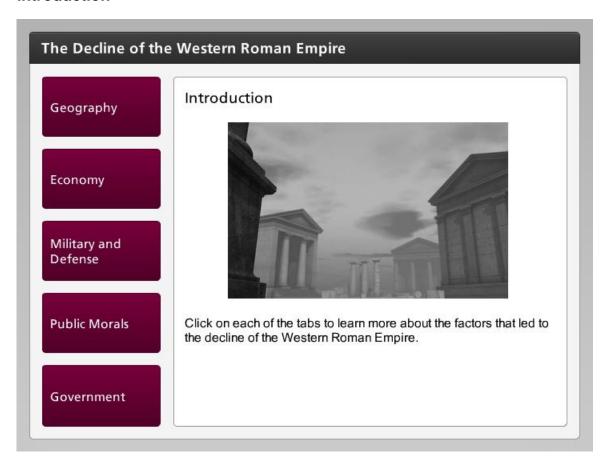
Topic 6 Content: The Decline of the Western Roman Empire

Introduction

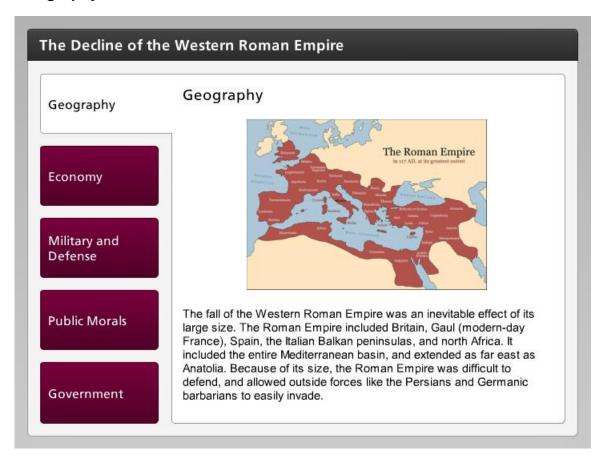


Click on each of the tabs to learn more about the factors that led to the decline of the Western Roman Empire.



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Geography

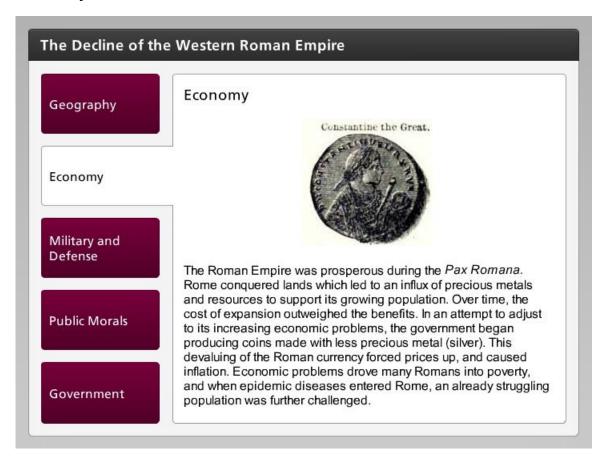


The fall of the Western Roman Empire was an inevitable effect of its large size. The Roman Empire included Britain, Gaul (modern-day France), Spain, the Italian Balkan peninsulas, and northern Africa. It included the entire Mediterranean basin, and extended as far east as Anatolia (modern-day Turkey). Because of its size, the Roman Empire was difficult to defend, which allowed outside forces like the Persians and Germanic barbarians to easily invade.



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Economy

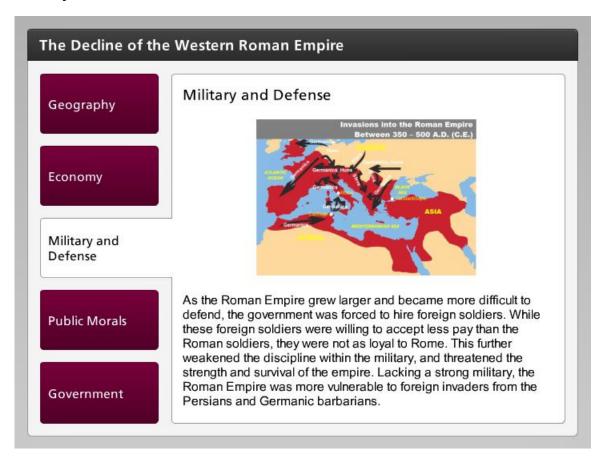


The Roman Empire was prosperous during the *Pax Romana*. Rome conquered lands, which led to an influx of precious metals and resources to support its growing population. Over time, the cost of expansion outweighed the benefits. In an attempt to adjust to its increasing economic problems, the government began producing coins made of less precious metal (silver). This devaluing of the Roman currency forced prices up, and caused inflation. Economic problems drove many Romans into poverty, and when epidemic diseases entered Rome, an already struggling population was further challenged.



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Military and Defense

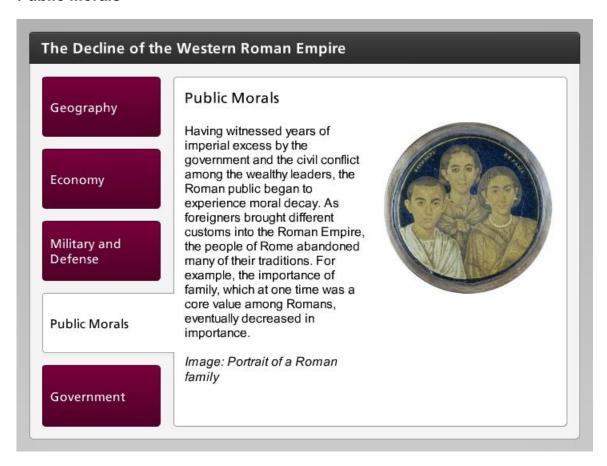


As the Roman Empire grew larger and became more difficult to defend, the government was forced to hire foreign soldiers. While these foreign soldiers were willing to accept less pay than the Roman soldiers, they were not as loyal to Rome. This further weakened the discipline within the military, and threatened the strength and survival of the empire. Lacking a strong military, the Roman Empire was more vulnerable to foreign invaders from the Persians and Germanic barbarians.



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Public Morals



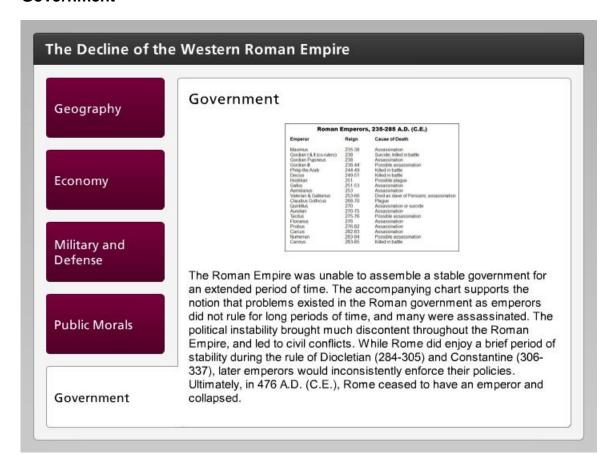
Having witnessed years of imperial excess by the government and the civil conflict among the wealthy leaders, the Roman public began to experience moral decay. As foreigners brought different customs into the Roman Empire, the people of Rome abandoned many of their traditions. For example, the importance of family, which at one time was a core value among Romans, eventually decreased in importance.

Image: Portrait of a Roman family



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Government



The Roman Empire was unable to assemble a stable government for an extended period of time. The accompanying chart supports the notion that problems existed in the Roman government, as emperors did not rule for long periods of time and many were assassinated. The political instability brought much discontent throughout the Roman Empire, and led to civil conflicts. While Rome did enjoy a brief period of stability during the rules of Diocletian (284-305) and Constantine (306-337), later emperors would inconsistently enforce their policies. Ultimately, in 476 A.D. (C.E.), Rome ceased to have an emperor and collapsed.

