AUTOPSY OF AN EMPIRE

Directions: Today you will be conducting an autopsy of an empire. In your autopsy report, you must address:

- Who your “patient” was in healthier times in a “Patient History”. Include how your empire was organized and what its strengths were (1 full paragraph)
- Detailed analysis that reports on at least 5 causes of the decline/demise of your patient. These causes should be diagramed and presented creatively on your subject’s body below and annotated and explained in the space around the body.
- Demonstrate creativity as you present the historical nature of the empire’s demise: from the name of your patient to how you present the demise of your subject.

PATIENT NAME: Romulus Augustus (Western Roman Empire)

PATIENT HISTORY: The Roman Empire was born as a city-state on the banks of the Tiber River in 753 BCE. It quickly expanded with its vast legions to control the entire Mediterranean and its Mediterranean neighbors. In the process, it shifted from a monarchy to a republic, though the patrician class dominated. Trade connections were made throughout the Mediterranean Sea and a system of roads that linked Europe with North Africa and the Middle East. These connections allowed an indirect trade which included the Great Silk Road, Indian Ocean, and Trans-Saharan routes. After a brief period of crisis that saw the end of the Republic and the fall of Dictator Julius Caesar, his successor (Augustus Caesar) became the first emperor and ushered in a period of imperial stability, the “Pax Romana.” During this two-hundred-year period, the empire reached the peak of its territorial control over a multi-cultural land and experienced the introduction of monotheistic Christianity to the empire. Despite periods of imperial persecution, Christianity began to take hold and gradually replaced Rome’s polytheistic state religion. By 180 CE, the empire was facing numerous internal and external problems.

1. Inert Emperors & Government Corruption
   - Political instability was caused in part by emperors who primarily used their positions as a means of personal advancement and fame. Assassinations and takeovers by generals added to the chaos.

2. Barbarian Invasions
   - The Roman Empire, after c. 200 CE, was unable to prevent invasions by barbarian groups such as the Germanic Goths, Huns, and Vandals.
   - As a result, what was once a unified Western Empire was divided into a multitude of barbarian kingdoms.

3. Plagues
   - Trade connections via the Great Silk Road, Mediterranean, and Roman Roads led to the diffusion of several deadly plagues that originated in Central & East Asia.

4. Over-reliance on slave labor
   - The Roman relied heavily on slave labor. An estimated 1/3 of all people living in the empire were enslaved. As a result, technological innovation was hindered, particularly in agriculture, as manual labor was not in short supply. There was little motivation to improve work efficiency.

5. Rise of the Eastern Roman Empire
   - To improve administration of the vast empire, Diocletian divided the empire into Eastern and Western halves in 285.
   - However, the Western Empire was far weaker and poor. As a result, Constantine moved the capital to the East (Constantinople) where the empire had greater forces. The Eastern Empire was more prosperous and better protected.

6. Over-taxation
   - To cover the increasing costs of operating a massive empire, protecting borders against nomadic barbarians, and meeting food demands of corrupt officials, taxes were increasingly raised to the point of becoming an overwhelming burden on peasants.