

ROME

A DECLINING EMPIRE



Unimagined wealth and power

Nearly 200 years of *Pax Romana* had expressed itself in unimagined wealth and power. Yet society had become polarized: the patrician elite lived in fabulous wealth and idle luxury while the populace was crammed into slums, with some 30-40% unemployed, idle, and discontent. Public holidays, over 150 a year, provided the opium of amusement for both.

Splendid public buildings, made possible by an efficient and exacting taxation system, expressed the national identity of this multicultural society in which being a Roman citizen had little to do with Latin culture or participation in the political institutes of Rome.



Unstable imperial rule

Rome's republican foundation gave way to imperial rule. Its moral standards crumbled under the weight of its rulers' lust, perversion, cruelty, and oppression. During the first three centuries of imperial Rome, 50 emperors occupied the throne, with 37 of them dying violent deaths, often at the hands of their successor or mistress.