Ancient Rome: DBQ ESSAY: Causes of the fall of the Roman Empire
Name: _______________________________ Period: ___________
Task: What caused the fall of the Western Roman Empire?
In the third century AD Rome faced many problems. In addition to internal
decay, the invasion by the Germanic tribes seemed to sound the death
knell for the Western Roman Empire. Historians have examined both the
internal conditions that weakened the expansive empire and the external
force of the barbarian invasions and have presented a variety of
explanations for the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

Document 1

This excerpt is from a textbook, The Course of Civilization by Strayer,
Gatzke & Harbison (1961)
The basic trouble was that very few inhabitants of the empire believed that
the old civilization was worth saving … the overwhelming majority of the
population had been systematically excluded from political responsibilities.
They could not organize to protect themselves; they could not serve in the
army . . . Their economic plight was hopeless. Most of them were serfs
bound to the soil, and the small urban groups saw their cities slipping into
uninterrupted decline.

1. What were the basic problems facing the Western Roman Empire
according to the authors?
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Document 2

Excerpt from The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire by Edward
Gibbon.
The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate
greatness (large size)… The introduction … of Christianity, had some
influence on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The clergy
successfully preached the doctrine of patience; the active virtues of society
were discouraged; and the last remains of military spirit were buried in the
cloister; a large portion of public & private wealth was consecrated to the
…demands of charity and devotion …
2. According to the excerpt from Gibbon, what were two causes for the fall of Rome? Explain both.

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Document 3
This excerpt is from Uses of the Past by Herbert J. Muller.
First the economic factor …While the empire was expanding, its prosperity was fed by plundered wealth and by new markets in the semibarbaric provinces. When the empire ceased to expand, however, economic progress soon ceased…. The abundance of slaves led to growth of the latifundia, the great estates that … came to dominate agriculture and ruin the free coloni (farmers) who drifted to the cities, to add to the unemployment there. The abundance of slaves kept wages low.

3a. What economic issues does Muller identify as causes for decline? Explain.
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3b. How was slavery a cause for the decline of the Roman Empire?
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Document 4
This excerpt, from The New deal in Old Rome by Henry Haskell, blames the decline on the heavy taxation required to support the government expenses.
…Part of the money went into … the maintenance of the army and of the vast bureaucracy required by a centralized government…the expense led to strangling taxation… The heart was taken out of enterprising
men...tenants fled from their farms and businessmen and workmen from their occupations. 
Private enterprise was crushed & the state was forced to take over many kinds of businesses to keep the machine running. People learned to expect something for nothing. The old Roman virtues of selfreliance & initiative were lost in that part of the population on relief (welfare)...The central government undertook such farreaching responsibility in affairs that the fiber of the citizens weakened.

4a. Why did the Roman government have large expenses?

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4b. What was the effect of high taxation on the people?

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4c. What effect did the establishment of a government welfare system have on the people?

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Document 5
This excerpt, from *Romans without Laurels* by Indro Montanelli, blames the fall on “internal decay,” specifically that of the military. Rome, like all great empires, was not overthrown by external enemies but undermined by internal decay. . . .The military crisis was the result of proud old aristocracy’s…shortage of children. (Consequently) foreigners poured into the…Roman army [was] composed entirely of Germans

5. What does this author identify as the cause of problems in the military?

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6a. According to the map above, what was the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire?
6b. Was this a unified attack?

Task: What caused the fall of the Western Roman Empire?

Example: What caused the fall of the Roman Empire?
Cause: Citizens were apathetic (did not care), serfs in debt bondage – farming in decline
Cities were in hopeless decline. (doc. 1)
Effect: Lack of pride and effort led to a feeling of hopelessness in the empire.
This led to a slow and steady decay.

Hints:
The reality of the "Fall of Rome "splinter" or "crumble" would be a better metaphor. It was a long, slow process of governmental decentralization that led to the birth of several smaller states founded largely on Roman local administration

These states foretold of the formation of modern nations of Western Europe and North Africa. These new states proved stronger and more adaptable collective than the bureaucracy laden old Roman government.