

# Famed Historian Explains How a Civilization Collapses

Will and Ariel Durant are famous for their magisterial 11-volume survey of human history titled [\*The Story of Civilization\*](#). After spending fifty years of studying and reflecting on the history of mankind, they are at the very least an interesting authority to consult on the matter.

In [\*The Lessons of History\*](#)—written after they completed their historical survey—they take up a question in the minds of many Americans today: What causes a civilization to decay and eventually collapse? Here is what they concluded:

## 1) The failure of leadership to respond to challenges.

“When the group or a civilization declines, it is through no mystic limitation of a corporate life, but through the failure of its political or intellectual leaders to meet the challenges of change.” According to the Durants, decay may come as a result of either one or several unmet challenges in various spheres: economics, education, agriculture, etc.

## 2) The growth of inequality.

“Since inequality grows in an expanding economy, a society may find itself divided between a cultured minority and a majority of men and women too unfortunate by nature or circumstance to inherit or develop standards of excellence and taste. As this majority grows it acts as a cultural drag upon the minority; its ways of speech, dress, recreation, feeling, judgment, and thought spread upward, and internal barbarization by the majority is part of the price that the minority pays for its control of educational and economic opportunity.”

### 3) The loss of religion.

“As education spreads, theologies lose credence, and receive an external conformity without influence upon conduct or hope. Life and ideas become increasingly secular...”

### 4) The loss of morality.

“Caught in the relaxing interval between one moral code and the next, an unmoored generation surrenders itself to luxury, corruption, and a restless disorder of family and morals, in all but a remnant clinging desperately to old restraints and ways.”

In the end, write the Durants, “a decisive defeat in war may bring a final blow, or barbarian invasion from without may combine with barbarism welling up from within to bring the civilization to a close.”

Incompetent leadership, growing inequality, a progressively dumbed down population, secularization, and a relaxation of morals... Sound familiar?

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