AP World History: Classical Era ***Classroom Set***

Rome concepts

Roman Republic

After overthrowing a king, the Romans founded the Roman republic in 509 B.C.E. In a republic, unlike in a direct democracy like the assembly of Athens, the people choose the officials who govern. The power to rule was entrusted to two elected executives, called consuls, who served a one-year term. In times of crisis, a dictator would be elected for six months.

The consul consulted regularly with an advisory body, the Roman senate, which was composed entirely of patricians, or aristocrats. The system of having two consuls with a senate body provided an early “checks and balances” system on each other’s powers.

Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar was a very successful Roman statesman and military commander who expanded the Roman republic through a series of conquests across Europe. Rising rapidly in popularity, he successfully campaigned for the consularship in 60 B.C.E. In 44 B.C.E., Julius Caesar named himself dictator for life. This move antagonized even his allies, and a group of senators killed him in March that year. His successors continued the tradition of calling themselves a dictator, or “emperor,” ushering in the Roman empire.

All Roads Lead to Rome



The Romans created an amazing network of roads all across the empire, initially to move troops to trouble spots (and back home again), but then also for speedy communication and ease of pre-motorized travel.

Roman [roads](http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_roadtypes.htm) were the veins and arteries of the Roman military system. Through these highways, armies could march across the Empire from the Euphrates to the Atlantic. In fact, they built the roads in such a topology that there was a road from any city to Rome, but no road connecting more than two neighboring cities directly. That way cities could not band together to resist Rome, since to go from city A to B you had to pass through the long way: through Rome.

Incidentally, this phrase is also an English [idiom](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-an-idiom.htm) that means that different methods of doing something will eventually lead to the same result.

Military

Much of Rome’s success in expansion is due to the rules governing their army, or “legion.” Strength of body and character made Romans good soldiers. Strict discipline enabled them to march for days, subsisting on little food and water, and trained them to obey orders to the death without thought of retreat or surrender.

Roman commanders rewarded men who fought bravely, while punishments for failure to fight were severe. If a group of men deserted, their commander randomly selected one-tenth of the deserters to be beaten to death. “*This is carried out as follows,”* explains a Greek statesman named Polybius. “*The tribune takes a cudgel and lightly touches the condemned man with it, whereupon all the soldiers fall upon him with clubs and stones, and usually kill him in the camp itself.”* Fear of this punishment kept Roman soldiers at their posts even when defeat was certain.

For law and language to extend throughout the Roman empire, control first had to be maintained. Order and rule had to be unequivocally established, and the responsibility for this fell to the legions of Rome. When not fighting, soldiers built roads, aqueducts and fortifications. Because of their duties other than fighting, the legions served as agents spreading the Roman culture and language to outlying provinces from their garrisons.

Treatment of conquered people

Each conquest brought new territory to be administered by the Roman empire. These territories were typically ruled as military districts by a governor, usually a former consul, appointed by the senate. Each Roman governor was in charge of an extremely large area with a small staff. This meant that the governor almost always left the conquered peoples’ previous governmental structures in place.

To speakers of Latin among their defeated enemies, the Romans offered all the privileges of citizenship and the accompanying obligations; those who did not speak Latin had to pay taxes and serve as solders but could not participate in the political system.

Pax Romana

“Pax Romana” is Latin for “Roman peace.” This phrase refers to a period of approximately 200 years, from 27 B.C.E. to 180 C.E., when Rome experienced unprecedented peace and economic prosperity throughout the empire. During the Pax Romana, the Roman Empire reached its peak in terms of land area, and its population swelled to an estimated 70 million people. Rome's citizens were relatively secure, and the government generally maintained law, order, and stability.

During this phase, Rome made many advances and accomplishments, particularly in engineering and the arts, as well as an extension of their road system. Rome became the economic, political, and cultural capital of the entire Western world.

Christian persecution and the Popularity of Christianity: see *Crash Course, episode #11: Christianity from Judaism to Constantine*

Succession issue

Rome never solved the problem of how to peacefully transfer political power to a new leader. When an emperor died, ambitious rivals with independent armies often fought each other for the emperor’s crown.

Even when the transfer of power happened without fighting, there was no good system for choosing the next emperor. Often the Praetorian Guard, the emperor’s private army, chose the new ruler. But they frequently chose leaders who would reward them rather than those who were best prepared to be emperor.

“Bread and circuses”

Rome in the first two centuries C.E. faced a yawning gulf between rich and poor. Its economy created few exportable goods. Slaves acquired by conquest built most of its bridges, roads and aqueducts and took jobs in farming, mining and construction. As this cheaper labor replaced Roman citizens, idle, unemployed, hungry people filled the capital. The Caesars doled out free grain and added holidays until, eventually, the Romans spent half their days attending gladiator games, public executions and chariot races (the term *circus* comes from the Latin word for “circle,” referring to the round arena used for holding public events throughout Rome, such as the Coliseum).

The term “bread and circuses,” then, describes the system of state bribery and distraction, using food and entertainment as diversions from the issues that were causing strife. This political strategy was meant to keep the masses from getting bored and restless, and potentially challenging their situation, rather than addressing the underlying issues making the masses discontent. This strategy was a sign that things were not going well for the empire, and was one of the indicators that the empire was in decline.

The contemporary use of this phrase refers to a cynical political view that the masses can be kept happy with unintellectual forms of mass entertainment at the cost of true political reform.

Incidentally, the name of the capitol city in *Hunger Games* was *Panem*, which is Latin for “bread.”

Law code

As the Roman republic grew and then transformed into an empire, its rulers faced the increasing challenge of governing an increasingly diverse and far-flung population. Legal questions and disputes inevitably arose not only among Roman citizens, but with non-citizens living in or traveling through its territories. This led to a body of laws that applied to all people, foreigners and non-citizens as well as citizens. The equal legal treatment of all citizens was unique to the Romans in the classical era: the Persian rulers and Alexander the Great always treated the subject peoples of their empires differently.

The Romans based this body of laws on the belief that there was a universal law of justice that came from nature. By this natural law, every person had rights. Judges in Roman courts tried to make just, or fair, decisions that respected people’s rights. Of course, their courts did not treat the poor slaves as equal to the rich.

In addition, Roman law was based on the concept of the rights of the individual. It is from the Romans that we inherited the belief that a man should be considered innocent until he is proven guilty.

These laws, and later compilations, became the foundational source for law in Western societies.

Latin

An especially important legacy of Rome was their language, Latin. After the fall of the empire, Latin continued to be used by scholars and the Roman Catholic Church. Church scribes used Latin to record important documents. Educated Europeans learned Latin so they could communicate with their peers in other countries.

Latin remains extremely influential today. Several modern European languages developed from Latin, including Italian, Spanish and French. English has borrowed heavily from Latin, both directly and by way of French. In fact, we still use the Latin alphabet, although Latin has 23 letters and English has 26.

You can see the influence of Latin on many of the words we use today. For example, our calendar comes from the one adopted by the Roman ruler Julius Caesar. The names of several months come from Latin, such as *August*, which honors Caesar Augustus.

Engineering

[Romans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire) are famous for their advanced [engineering](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engineering) accomplishments, although some of their own inventions were improvements on older ideas, concepts and inventions. Their engineering achievements and legacy includes their arches, used in aqueducts, bridges, and domes, as well as their superior roads.