

THE ROMAN REPUBLIC: Influence on U.S. Government



WHAT CAN THE ROMANS TEACH US ABOUT CIVIC VIRTUE?

NOTES PACKET DIRECTIONS

I. READ THIS ENTIRE NOTES PACKET.

It is recommended that you read every night, staying a page or so ahead of where we are in class. At the end of the unit, reread everything.

II. ANNOTATE THIS ENTIRE NOTES PACKET.

This packet serves as your Government Class notebook. Make it yours; annotate it.

HOW TO ANNOTATE.

- Using pen, pencil, highlighter, or whatever works for you: underline the key ideas, terms, and information as you read.
- **Take your own notes** directly on the pages and on notes paper.

-Put things in your own words.

-If you don't know the meaning of a word or phrase, look it up or ask in class, then write down the definition or meaning.

-Write down any questions you have (make sure you follow up and get the answers).

-Include inferences and connections you can make.

-Include your reactions or opinion.

III. TURN THESE NOTE IN WHEN YOU TAKE THE TEST.

LATE NOTES PACKETS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

IV. SAVE THESE NOTES

1. To study for the final exam.
2. For life!

WHAT WAS THE ROMAN REPUBLIC?

The **Roman Republic** remains the longest lived republic in history, existing from 509 BC to 27 BC. Until the past century or two, republics were very rare. The Romans created a **mixed government based on the rule of law**, in which consuls, a senate, and an assembly had separate powers. Their oligarchic republic evolved over time, expanding citizenship and citizens' rights, and becoming more democratic.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO LEARN ABOUT THE ROMAN REPUBLIC?

The founders of the United States studied the history, literature, and philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Romans (this is called **the classics** or classical studies), and were especially interested in the Roman Republic. Alexander Hamilton's views were typical of the other founders when he exclaimed in Federalist #34 that the Roman Republic had "attained to the utmost height of human greatness." If the Romans could make a republic succeed, then so could we! With the advantages of so many historical lessons on which to build, Americans believed we could improve upon the Roman example, and show the world that societies based on liberty and rule of law could prosper!

HOW DID THE ROMANS *KEEP THEIR REPUBLIC* FOR SO LONG?

Many Americans read the works of an ancient Roman historian named Titus Livius (usually known as **Livy**). According to Livy and others, most Roman citizens of the Republic had great **civic virtue**. The citizens were described as **honest, hard-working, devoted to family, simple in their ways of life, and patriotic. They valued Liberty and Justice.** Because they loved their country more than themselves, the common people (called plebeians) and the elite born (called patricians) shared political powers, and governed themselves without a king. They were described as putting the **general welfare** ahead of the narrow interests of their own groups. *This is the logic and goal of republicanism.* Maybe the Romans were less virtuous than the American founders imagined, but this idea of civic virtue had a huge impact on them.



1585 Portrait of Livy
by Andre Thevet

WHAT IS CIVIC VIRTUE?

Civic virtue

The values and habits of behavior required for a moral, successful citizenry. Virtues are, by definition, not forced but chosen.

IN A REPUBLIC, civic virtue requires that all citizens support the common good or general welfare, not just their own interests, or those of their political party, or of their own racial, economic, religious, or other group. Free people determine their own destinies, and pursue their own happiness and interests, **respecting the rights of everyone else** to do the same. Being *virtuous* is seeking “The Good” for its own sake, putting family, community, and country above personal appetites. *Virtuous citizens balance freedom and responsibility.*

WHY IS CIVIC VIRTUE SO IMPORTANT?

The need for civic virtue is so great in our system, many have described it as **republican virtue**. As citizens in a republic we must take **personal responsibility** for our freedom and self-government. Republican virtues do not come automatically, we have to *will* them into existence! Being honest, hard-working, modest in our lifestyles, tolerant of others, and resilient in the face of difficulties requires **thoughtful practice**. These qualities of character require encouragement through strong families, religious guidance, and proper education. If virtuous, we succeed in a **struggle** against our own weaknesses and impulses, and we gladly perform the **duties of citizenship**.

Hey! Elites! We don't need your noblesse oblige !



DONT NOBLESSE OBLIGE ON ME

WHAT LESSONS FROM ROME HAD THE GREATEST INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN REPUBLICANISM?

There are a great many lessons, but we will focus on just a few of the most important.

THE STORY OF CINCINNATUS

Nearly all Americans used to know the story of **Cincinnatus**, a hero from the early days of the Roman Republic. Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus became legendary for demonstrating what civic virtue is all about. After living a life of service to Rome, he retired with his wife to a small farm outside the capitol. In 458 BC, the young republic was attacked and Cincinnatus was again asked to serve his country. Here is the story as told by **HL Havell in *Republican Rome*, published 1923:**

...After a short interval of peace the Aqueuianians had taken the field again [violating a truce made with Rome in 459 BC], and having pitched their camp on Mount Algidus, were plundering the fields of Tusculum and Labici. Envoys were sent from Rome to protest... and they found the Aqueuian general, Cloelius Gracchus, sitting before his tent under the shade of a venerable oak. He heard their complaints with a contemptuous smile, and answered, pointing to the spreading boughs of the oak, "talk to that tree, I have other business at hand."

The Romans failed in their first attempts against the Aqueuianians. For the consul Minucius, who was appointed to lead the Roman army, acted imprudently and allowed himself to be caught in a deep valley, shut in by steep cliffs, and barred at both ends by the soldiers of Gracchus. A few horsemen, however, contrived to break through the enemy's lines, and brought news to Rome of the consul's sore strait.

Now Cincinnatus at this time was living on his little farm beyond the Tiber River, and one day as he was digging in a field messengers came to him from the Senate and told him he had been appointed dictator, that he might save Minucius and his army from destruction [the appointment of a temporary dictator was sometimes done in the Roman Republic during times of crisis]. Cincinnatus thus became supreme ruler of Rome, on the condition that he relinquish his power after six months. Bidding his wife farewell, he went with the messengers to Rome. On the following day he proclaimed all business was to be suspended in the city, and that every man of military age was to go armed to the Field of Mars [the Field of Mars inspired the creation of the American village green, where colonial militia would drill], taking with him food for five days and twelve wooden stakes.

By evening all was ready, and such was their dispatch that this new Roman army reached Mount Algidus at midnight, and soon after came to the place where Minucius had been blockaded for three days. Having examined the position, Cincinnatus drew out his forces so as to completely surround the Aqueuian Army, and as each man reached his post he planted his stakes and began to dig a trench. Thus the besiegers became the besieged, and suddenly a great shout from beyond the Aqueuian lines told the men of Minucius that succor was at hand. Being thus caught in a trap, Gracchus was compelled to make what terms he could, and he and his army were passed under the yolk [they surrendered].

Thus did Cincinnatus save a Roman army from ruin and disgrace, and within sixteen days he was once more on his estate, ploughing and digging his fields as a simple farmer [he gave up his power!].



Constantino Brumidi painted this fresco in the **US Capitol Building** interior. It depicts Cincinnatus at the moment of his great decision.

GEORGE WASHINGTON: AMERICAN CINCINNATUS

Washington's great adversary, King George III, asked his American painter, Benjamin West, what Washington would do after winning independence. West replied, "They say he will return to his farm." "If he does that," the incredulous monarch said, "he will be the greatest man in the world."

-David Boaz, *The Man Who Would Not Be King*, CATO.org, Feb. 20, 2006

You probably guessed why our first president became known as the "American Cincinnatus." He gave up power and returned to his farm not once but twice: after serving his country as lead general in the Revolutionary War, then again after two terms as president. For that, Washington was admired near and far, and was thereafter compared to the ancient Roman who modeled civic virtue.



This 1840 statue, now at the National Museum of American history, depicts Washington (in Roman toga!) giving up power in the tradition of Cincinnatus.



Guess the city where this statue of CINCINNATUS is located...

ROMANS STRUGGLED, AND EVENTUALLY FAILED, TO KEEP THE REPUBLIC

If a lesson of republican Rome was that civic virtue made it a success, another lesson was that the great republic was lost. After centuries of expansion, challenges, triumphs, and reforms, the republic became divided and corrupt. Eventually the republic ended in civil war, and became an **empire**.

Why did Romans give up control over their government, and allow the rule of the Caesars (emperors)? There are many reasons their republic ultimately failed, but the idea that **too many Romans had lost their civic virtue** was a most important explanation in the minds of America's founders. Early Americans viewed that over time, more and more **Romans took their freedoms for granted**. Romans became more **decadent, divided** by group identities and interests, and **easily manipulated by demagogues**. They increasingly cared more about entertainment and a life of ease, than virtuous duties of citizenship. For example, games at **colosseums** became an obsession for many Romans, who came to expect that their needs and their pleasures should be guaranteed by the government. Combat between **gladiators**, slaves trained to fight to the death, became especially popular for crowds packed into colosseums across the republic.



Late republic period: colosseum in Pompeii



Romans cheering as their favorite **gladiator** slaughters his opponent (scene from *Spartacus* series on Starz)

BREAD AND CIRCUSES

*".. Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions — everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: **bread and circuses.**"* - Juvenal, Roman Poet, 100 AD

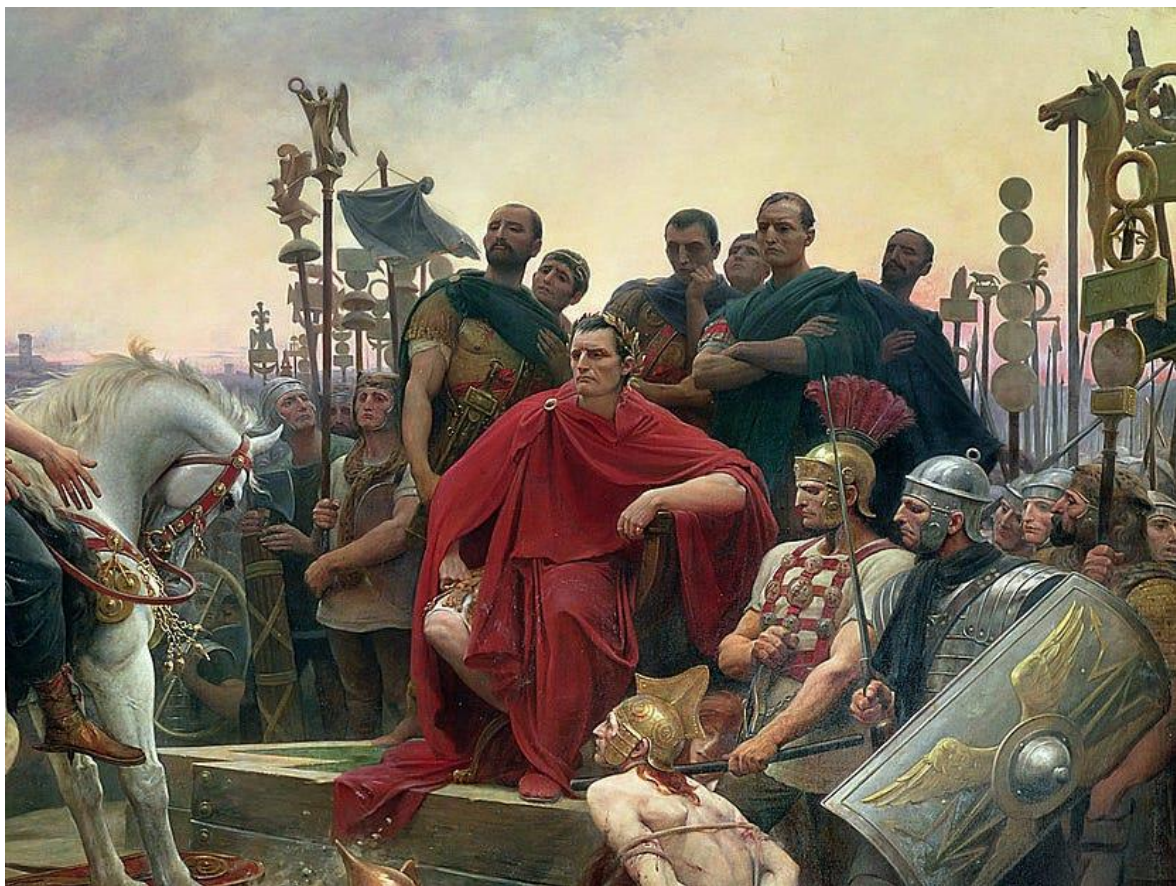
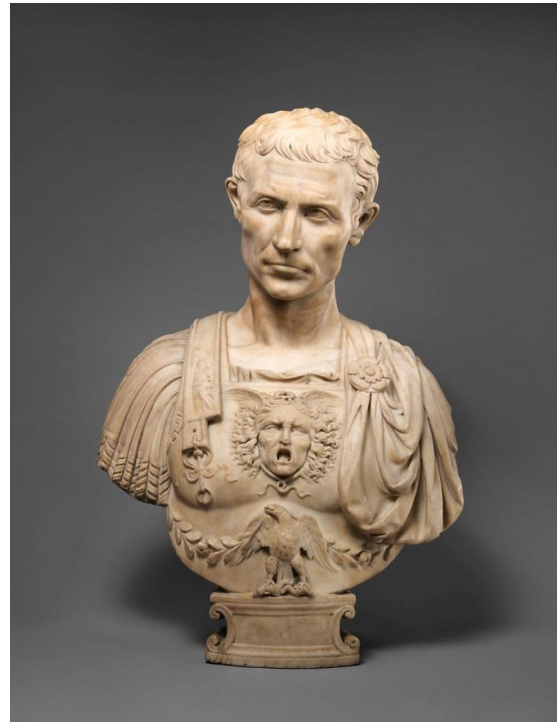
The phrase "**bread and circuses**" has become a general reference to a lack of civic virtue in the masses. Some Romans had warned about this, but their society had apparently changed. *The Mob* cared more about the Games, and free food doled out by government, than patriotic duties and the responsibilities of freedom. Early Americans cautioned that we would lose our own fragile republic unless we are careful to promote civic virtues, and resist the temptations of dependency that seemed to doom freedom in ancient Rome...



Ruins of the Roman Colosseum

THE RISE OF CAESAR

Julius Caesar was an exceptional general and beloved hero of Rome. He was also a skilled politician and charismatic *man of the people*. He understood his country had become corrupt and perceived it was his patriotic duty to bring hope and change! But Caesar thought he alone could solve Rome's problems. He believed if all power was in his hands, he could make Rome great again! (Yes, Obama's and Trump's slogans are used on purpose here. But let's not get carried away, neither of them used their slogans to become tyrants. Julius used great powers of demagoguery to convince Romans to give up the republic, and declare him Ruler!) Defying Roman law and an order from the Senate, in 49 BC **Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon** River with his army, starting a chain of events that led to his assassination, civil war, the death of the republic, and the rise of the empire.



"THE DIE IS CAST"

*"Having for many years aimed at absolute power, Caesar had... accomplished what he intended. He had conciliated the ignorant crowd by shows, public works, gifts of food, and banquets; he had bound his own party to him by rewards, his adversaries by a show of clemency. In short he had already brought to a free community the **habit of slavery**, partly out of fear, partly out of passiveness."*

-Cicero, Second Philippic

THE STORY AS TOLD BY SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* is based on history and taught important lessons embraced by the US Founders and early Americans. It tells of a heroic Marcus Brutus vainly trying to save the republic from Caesar, his friend. After reluctantly taking part in Caesar's assassination, Brutus tried to explain his unpopular actions to an angry crowd of Romans. He spoke honestly and directly, appealing to their ideals of liberty and republicanism. They applauded. Then Brutus allowed **Marc Antony**, a supporter and protégé of Caesar's, to speak. Shakespeare portrays an infamous example of **demagoguery** in Marc Antony:

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar.

The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.

...He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.
...

When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept!
...Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.

You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And, sure, he is an "honorable" man.
...

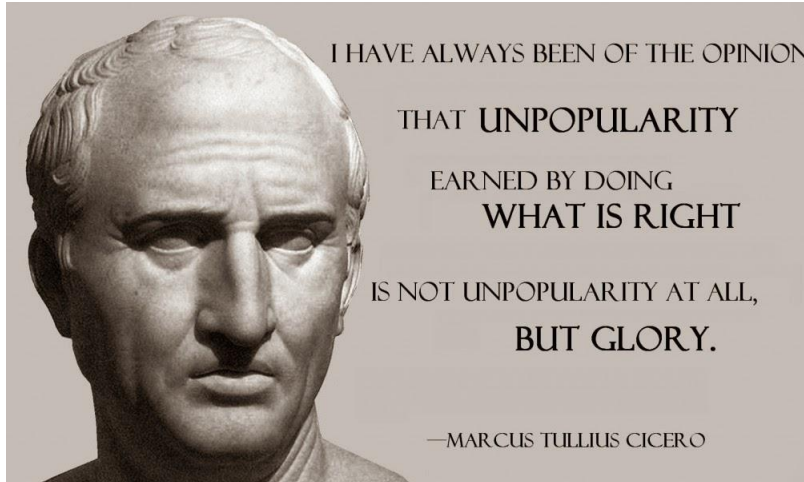
You all did love him once, not without cause:
What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?
O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me!

By the end of Antony's speech, the **fickle mob** turned angrily and violently against Brutus. Now Marc Antony, *man of the people*, led them to war against the republic and their own countrymen...



Marc Antony,
played by Marlon Brando
in *Julius Caesar* 1953

THE LESSONS AND HEROISM OF CICERO



"Do not blame Caesar, blame the people of Rome who have so enthusiastically acclaimed and adored him and rejoiced in their loss of freedom and danced in his path and given him triumphal processions. Blame the people who hail him when he speaks in the Forum of the "new wonderful good society" which shall now be Rome's, interpreted to mean "more money, more ease, more security, and more living fatly at the expense of the industrious".

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO (106 BC to 43 BC), the Roman statesman, lawyer and philosopher, is one of the greatest influences on the founders of the United States. The writings and speeches of Cicero are among the most important in the development of **Natural Law philosophy** and republican government. Cicero was a tragic figure. He spent his life defending the ideals of civic virtue, liberty, and republicanism against corrupt, ambitious politicians and an increasingly **venal** public. Even though Julius Caesar was a friend, Cicero publicly defended his assassination, and challenged Marc Antony's efforts to follow in Caesar's footsteps. Below are a few lines from **Cicero's *Second Philippic*** (The *Philippics* were a series of speeches condemning Mark Antony). These were his final speeches to the Roman Senate, given shortly before Marc Antony had Cicero killed.

...Marc Antony... treat me as you will, but do not abandon the republic.
But decide on your own conduct; I myself know what mine will be.
I defended the republic in my youth, I will not desert it now that I am old.
The name of peace is sweet, the thing itself is a blessing.
But between peace and slavery there is a wide difference.
Peace is liberty in tranquility; slavery is the worst of all evils-
to be repelled, if need be, not only by war but even by death!



18 centuries later, an American named **Patrick Henry** was trying to convince his fellow citizens in the Virginia legislature to join other colonies in the revolution against Britain. Invoking Cicero, he ended his speech with these words:

"Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, that it be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course other men may take, but as for me, GIVE ME LIBERTY, OR GIVE ME DEATH!"

THE REPUBLIC DIED. LONG LIVE THE REPUBLIC?

After Rome became an empire, some of the traditions and values of the republic were preserved. Some Caesars were horrible tyrants, but others tried to rule according to republican principles of justice. One emperor of Rome was admired and studied by early Americans, who saw him as an important influence on their thinking.

MARCUS AURELIUS: THE PHILOSOPHER KING

Caesar **Marcus Aurelius** (121-180 AD) was the final emperor of a period known as the PAX ROMANA, when the Roman Empire attained great power, territory, and influence. Aurelius was an unusual monarch. He was an important **stoic philosopher** who contributed to the ideas of Natural Law philosophy. The **stoics**, you remember, emphasized the unity of all humans: we are all equally bound by the laws of nature and of universal justice. Aurelius wrote his ideas down in what came to be known as *The Meditations*, where he explained the importance of everyone striving to live a life of **virtue, reason, and self-control**. He also described his views on government.

You can understand why the US founders liked him:



Aurelius, depicted in the film *Gladiator*

“I learned from my brother Severus... **to love truth, and to love justice**; and from him I received the idea of a polity in which there is the **same law for all**, a polity administered with regard to **equal rights and equal freedom of speech**, and the idea of a kingly government that respected most of all the **freedom of the governed**. I learned from him also a consistency and undeviating steadiness in my regard for philosophy.”



“If thou findest in human life anything better than **Justice, Truth, Temperance, and Fortitude**,
...turn to it with all thy soul,
and enjoy that which thou hast found to be the Best.”

The **Four Chief Virtues** described by Marcus Aurelius are the essence of stoicism, and of civic virtue. By now you are familiar with the importance of valuing **Justice and Truth**, according to our founding principles.

Temperance means having control over your desires or appetites, so they don't control you. *Having control of yourself* is what freedom is all about in Natural Law philosophy! **Fortitude** is strength and bravery in the face of challenges. *When the going gets tough, The Tough get going!*

I think you are now ready to watch my movie...



MAXIMUS DECIMUS MERIDIUS,
Cincinnatus-inspired hero
in the film GLADIATOR