

# Notes on the roman republic: city-state to world empire essay sample

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Rome's great political achievement was to transcend the narrow political orientation of the city-state & to create a world state that unified the different nations of the Mediterranean world. Rome overcame the limitations of the city-state mentality & developed an empirewide system of law & citizenship. Their genius found expression in law and government, the practical, not the theoretical.

Historians divide Roman history into 2 broad periods: the Republic began in 509 B. C., w/ the overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy; the Empire began in 27 B. C., when Octavian (Augustus) became the 1st Roman emperor, ending 500 years of republican self-government. The Republic initiated the trend toward political & legal universalism, which reached fruition in the 2nd period, the Empire.

#### EVOLUTION OF THE ROMAN CONSTITUTION:

- \* The Romans, like the Greeks, came to view law as an expression of the public will and not as the creation of god-kings, priest-kings, or a priestly caste.
- \* Between the patricians and the commoners, or plebeians.
- \* Patricians owned most of the land and controlled the army.
- \* The Senate was the principal organ of patrician power.
- \* The tension between patricians and commoners stemmed from plebeian grievances, which included enslavement for debt, discrimination in the

courts, prevention of intermarriage with patricians, lack of political representation, and the absence of a written code of laws.

\* In about 450 B. C., the first Roman code of laws was written. Called the Twelve Tables, the code gave plebeians some degree of protection against unfair and oppressive patrician officials, who could interpret customary law in arbitrary way.

\* The Senate

\* Tribal Assembly

\* During their 200-year class struggle, the Romans forged a constitutional system based on civic needs rather than on religious mystery. The essential duty of government ceased to be the regular performance of religious rituals & became the maintenance of order at home & the preservation of Roman might & dignity in international relations.

\* Public interest, not religious tradition, determined the content of law and was the standard by which all important acts of the city were judged.

\* The Romans, unlike the Greeks, were distinguished by practicality and common sense, not by a love of abstract thought.

\* Without civic harmony and stability, Rome could not have achieved expansion.

ROMAN EXPANSION TO 146 B. C.:

\* By 146 B. C., Rome was the dominant state in the Mediterranean world.

Roman expansion occurred in three main stages-

1.) The uniting of the Italian peninsula, gave Rome the manpower that transformed it from a city-state into a great power.

2.) The collision with Carthage, from which Rome emerged as ruler of the western Mediterranean.

3.) The subjugation of the Hellenistic states, which brought Romans in close contact with Greek civilization.

\* During the 1st stage of this expansion, Rome extended its hegemony over Italy, subduing in the process neighboring Latin kinsmen, semicivilized Italian tribes, the once-dominant Etruscans, and Greek city-states in Southern Italy.

\* Rome's success was due to the character of its people and quality of its statesmanship.

\* Despite its army's might, Rome could not have mastered Italy w/o the cooperation of other Italian peoples. Like other ancient peoples, Rome plundered, enslaved, & brutalized, through generous treatment, to gain the loyalty of those it had conquered.

\* By 264 B. C., Rome had achieved two striking successes:

1.) First, it had secured social cohesion by redressing the grievances of the plebeians.

2.) Second, it had increased its military might by conquering Italy, thus obtaining the human resources with which it would conquer the Mediterranean world.

\* It is estimated that between 80 & 8 B. C. more than 2 million enslaved aliens were transported to Italy. By the middle of the century, slaves constituted about one-third of Italy's population.

\* Roman jurists and intellectuals regarded the division of humanity into masters and slaves as a rule of nature viewed the slave as an animate tool, an object that produced commodities.

\* Masters and Slaves.

\* Rome generally allowed its subjects a large measure of self-government & did not interfere w/ religion and local customs.

\* Essentially, Rome used its power for constructive ends: to establish order; to build roads, aqueducts, and public buildings; and to promote Hellenism.

#### CULTURE IN THE REPUBLIC:

\* Rome creatively assimilated the Greek achievement and transmitted it to others, thereby extending the orbit of Hellenism.

#### COLLAPSE OF THE REPUBLIC:

\* The established Roman administration proved unable to govern the Mediterranean world.

\* Internal dissension tore Rome apart as the drive for domination formerly directed against foreign enemies turned inward against fellow Romans. Civil war replaced foreign war.

\* Eventually it collapsed, a victim of class tensions, poor leadership, power hungry demagogues, and civil war.

\* Cleopatra-

o Greek queen of Egypt, belong to the Ptolemaic family, the Macedonian Greeks who ruled Egypt during the Hellenistic Age.

o Cleopatra became Julius Caesar's mistress when the Roman leader stopped at Alexandria.

Julius Caesar-

o In 60 B. C., a triumvirate, a ruling group of three, consisting of Julius Caesar (100-44 B. C.), a politician, Pompey, a general, and Crassus, a wealthy banker, conspired to take over Rome.

o Gaul...Future France

o Caesar realized that without his troops he would be defenseless.

o Caesar realized that republican institution no longer operated effectively and that only strong and enlightened leadership could permanently end the civil warfare destroying Rome.

o To improve administration he reorganized town governments in Italy, reformed the courts, and planned to codify the law.

o The end of senatorial government and their rule, which they equated with liberty, and as the beginning of a Hellenistic type of monarchy.

Octavian emerged as master of Rome and four years later became, in effect, the first Roman emperor.

The Roman Republic, which had amassed power to a degree hitherto unknown in the ancient world, was wrecked not by foreign invasion but by internal weaknesses: the personal ambitions of power seekers; the degeneration of senatorial leadership and the willingness of politicians to use violence; the formation of private armies in which soldiers gave their loyalty to their commander rather than to Rome.