

Roman class system

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



Roman Class System An integral part of Roman culture is the divergence of class systems. The laws of ancient Rome actually enforced this divide. People were born into one of two extremes. You were either considered upper class or lower class. There was no concept for a middle class in the Roman empire. This had a major influence in how you would live out your life. Children born into the noble class would eventually strive for a senate seat or to progress their wealth, while being born into the lower class, for the most part, were stuck there even though there was the ability for upward mobility it was extremely uncommon if not impossible in some cases. Aside from these two major groups of classes there was no bridging class between the two. No middle class to speak of creates a major distinction between wealth and life opportunities. The upper class consisted of two sub classes. These were Senators (Senatorial Class) or the rich (Equestrian Class). The Senatorial Class was completely defined by holding a political office and their families. They were distinguishable by tunics with broad stripes on them. There was also a massive monetary requirement attached as well, further enforcing the divide by being required to prove " that they had property worth at least 1, 000, 000 sesterces"(vroma. org). They had no income purely from being in the senate however but were forbidden to participate in any " nonagricultural business, trade or public contracts"(McManus). The Equestrian Class was the lowest of the Upper Class and was majorly defined by an individuals wealth or family line. They were set apart from society by wearing tunics with narrow stripes on them. " A man could be formally enrolled in the equestrian order if he could prove that he possessed a stable minimum amount of wealth (property worth at least 400, 000

sesterces)"(McManus). This price was mostly unattainable for common people and was a major driving factor in the massive divide between the Upper and Lower Class. The Equestrians were mostly entrusted with business that was prohibited for anyone who was in the Senatorial Class. In this particular class there was upward mobility possible but it was infrequent and not common at all. However if an individual was elected into the senate he legally became a member of the Senatorial Class along with his family. The lower class was virtually every other person in roman society, spanning from common people, people who lived in italy, foreigners, freed people, and even slaves at the very bottom of the bottom. Anyone who was born into the lower class, just like the upper class, remained in the lower class after birth. " On the streets of Rome citizens, non-citizens, slaves and ex-slaves may have mingled quite freely, showing few observable symbols of their status" (bbc. co. uk). This can be viewed as a further divide between the social elite and the rest of society because they made sure that everyone who saw them knew who they were based on their attire. However despite the massive gap in social classes it was still possible to bridge into nobility from the lower end of society, besides freed people and slaves. " Birth remained important, and new citizens, however wealthy, could be stigmatised by their past. Ex-slaves in particular could not escape the taint of slavery, and were not allowed to hold high office" (bbc. co. uk). Slaves and even freed slaves were particularly interesting in ancient roman society. Freed people could either be released from slavery by their masters or buy their freedom. They were seemingly only released from the title of of slavery for their blood line from then on however. They were ineligible for office positions; this and being still in

service of their former master, now their patron, made it impossible for a freedman to have any chance of mobility. Their children, on the other hand, became full Roman citizens. But even then they didn't receive the same treatment or chances through life. "There was a social stigma attached to being a freedman's son" (McManus). This made it difficult for even a freed person's children to succeed because of the name that distinguishes them from any other Roman citizen. But it seems that after a few generations the stigma was lost due to the lack of people to attest to any particular person's heritage over time as generations pass away (Dowlingsoka). This giving them just as much, although very slim, of a chance to bridge the seemingly impossible bridge from commoner to equestrian given enough success and wealth. It may have become clear that until now women have not been mentioned once. This is due to the fact that women had no say in their class. They were placed where they were purely because of the class that their father was or the class of their husband. Cicero makes it very clear how men saw females in society when he wrote, "Our ancestors, in their wisdom, considered that all women, because of their innate weakness, should be under the control of guardians" (roman-empire. net). This by no means says that women were not successful in their own right. "while Roman women held no direct political power, those from wealthy or powerful families could and did exert influence through private negotiations" (Milnor) Women used their connections very powerfully. For example "most prominently Livia, who contributed to the formation of Imperial mores" (Rawson). Roman society seems to have been extremely rigid when it came to most things, social classes in particular however. While the ability to leap from lower class

to upper class existed it was extremely difficult due to the wealth required to be legally considered an upper class citizen, and women were seemingly along for the ride. Women along side with slaves were unable to attain office and were looked down upon. However in both cases all was not lost, women took advantage of their connections and were able to make a real impact on history and slaves were able to, while not being fully freed themselves, give their blood line hope down the rode to becoming wealthy and successful

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