

Octavian augustus essay



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Octavian Augustus is known as the first, and one of the greatest, Roman Emperors ever.

Octavian enabled the long, peaceful time of the Pax Romana by changing Rome from a fragile, crumbling republican government to a mighty empire. Octavian's government was strong enough to withstand weak emperors who mismanaged the Empire as well. His changes proved to be the cornerstone of the greatest empire the world has ever seen. The Pax Romana, or Roman Peace, was a time of great prosperity for all people under Rome's rule.

Roman citizens enjoyed the spectacles of the gladiators in the coliseum and the comedies performed at the many theatres. The Romans are attributed with the development of concrete, which enabled them to build large structures such as aqueducts.

As Rome grew into the primary world leader, its Republican government was falling apart. The Senate was ineffective because it had no control of the vast armies that provided power. Conservative Romans who believed strongly in the Republic would immediately target a strong general who took sole control. Rome was in need of a solitary, powerful leader.

Octavian skillfully turned himself into an emperor without suffering the fate of his great-uncle, Caesar. He controlled the army, and managed to please the masses. Once in the position of power, he changed the government not only to benefit himself, but also to benefit the Empire and ultimately the people. This structure was so strong, that it could survive through weak emperors such as Caligula and Nero and major problems like who the next

emperor should be. Octavian was so influential that eventually the Romans did not care that they were no longer a Republic.

They knew that with Octavian, they could become the greatest empire in the world. Octavian was born on September 23, 63 B. C. His great-uncle was Julius Caesar and therefore he had many political connections in Rome. Octavian was favored by Caesar from an early age. In 48 Caesar had his fifteen-year-old great-nephew elected to the priestly college of the pontifices, and he also enrolled him in the hereditary patrician aristocracy of Rome: Octavian joined Caesar in 46 B.

C. E on campaign against Pompey in Spain. Later, Octavian was sent to Apollonia, on the coast of Greece, to attempt to finish his education. While in Apollonia, Octavian trained with Roman legions stationed there.

Only months after arriving in Apollonia, Octavian learned that Caesar was murdered. He also learned that he was named as the beneficiary in Caesar's will and had been formally adopted as his son. The will thrust tremendous power on Octavian. He was now the leader of a great army ready to follow the commands of Caesar's heir.

Octavian used this army to occupy Rome and force the Senate to make him consul. Marc Antony, who had been consul with Caesar, was now forced to create the alliance with Lepidus, a high priest, and Octavian. The three leaders divided the land that Rome had conquered. Antony controlled the East and Octavian the West. Lepidus controlled Africa. The leaders led a ruthless campaign to punish Caesar's assassins but soon turned on each other.

Octavian first attacked Lepidus and took control of Africa and all of Italy. Antony strained relations between Octavian and himself by divorcing Octavian's sister, in favor of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. Finally, in 31 B. C. , war broke out between Octavian and the combined forces of Cleopatra and Antony.

Octavian defeated his foes at the naval battle of Actium and became sole ruler of Rome. He returned to Rome in 29 B. C. and celebrated his recent victories against Antony.

Although Octavian insisted that he had restored the Republic, Rome had finally become an empire. It was too large to be ruled by a group of people; it needed a strong central authority that could make quick, efficient decisions. In 27 B. C.

, Octavian made a bold and clever political move by declaring the Republican Government restored. To the public, this sounded sincere, but it was really a ploy to gain more power. He immediately offered to resign from the position of consul, but the Senate, instead of accepting his offer, decided to give him the position of princeps, or first citizen. The Senate also gave him the name Augustus, meaning revered one. The Senate knew that it could not accept Octavian's offer to resign; he controlled a vast army and had tremendous personal wealth not to mention being the man who brought the civil wars to an end. The Senate decided to give Octavian control of the provinces of Gaul, Syria, Spain and Egypt.

These areas had large numbers of troops stationed within their borders giving Octavian almost total military authority. In 23 BC, Octavian renounced

his position as consul and became proconsul. He now had absolute control over the army without the administrative hassles of consul. Octavian was next granted the title of tribune of the people. Tribune was a very important position to Octavian.

The Tribune was supposed to represent the citizens of Rome and had the authority to veto any laws passed by the Senate. Octavian now had all the political powers of an emperor without the hatred that came with the title. To help run the empire, Octavian established an imperial household. The household ran the affairs of the empire and completed the various political tasks required by Octavian. He filled positions not only with former senators and statesmen, but also talented laborers and even an occasional slave.

Octavian's appointed men were much more efficient than the Senate. The household gained more and more power as time passed. While the household managed the daily affairs of the empire, Octavian made it his duty to beautify the city. He once said that he had found the city in brick, and left it in marble.

Octavian also organized fire and police brigades within the city. Octavian reformed the tax system by taking a census to determine how much each province should pay in taxes. He used this extra money to improve roads and harbors, which in turn increased trade. Although the Senate held little power, Octavian treated them with the utmost respect. Octavian addressed the Senators by their full names and attended any events he was invited to.

Octavian was careful to consult members of the Senate before making political decisions, even if he held little value in their opinions. In these ways,

the Senators remained happy with Octavian even as they gradually lost their power. Octavian became more and more powerful by becoming Pontifex Maximus, the religious head of state, in 12 B. C.

and Pater Patriae, or father of the country; in 2 B. C. Octavian held strong beliefs in traditional Roman religion. He restored over 80 temples and passed strict moral laws that mirrored older Roman values.

The return to traditional values was influential in uniting the empire. With his position solidified, Octavian set about on yet more reforms of government. He cast out Senators that he deemed unworthy and filled their spaces with provincial governors and army commanders. Octavian had by now changed the government exactly to his liking. He knew that his system would remain strong for many years to come.

When Octavian died in AD 14, his achievements seemed remarkable, and they would only become more remarkable as time passed. One thing Octavian had not prepared well for was who would succeed the emperor. Octavian had adopted his stepson Tiberius and made it clear he would be his successor but could anyone govern as well as Octavian had? Tiberius, although highly experienced and a superb commander of troops, did not have the personal touch of Octavian. Tiberius left Rome and lived on the island of Capri where he maintained his power as emperor, but was the target of many rumors and plots back in Rome.