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The Modern Day Roman Republic

The Correlation of the Roman Republic and the United States of America

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Abstract

When America's founding fathers sought to create their new nation, they turned to the reliability and practicality of the Roman Republic. While careful to not create a carbon copy of the Republic, the founders drew inspiration from Rome's symbolism and everyday life, government, philosophy, military strategies, and religious tolerance. This paper will highlight the similarities that exist between the Roman Republic and the United States in the above mentioned five areas. Much of Rome's example has outlived both Rome and the founding fathers in its effectiveness and viability. The Roman Republic may have fallen, but her influence lives on through the heartbeat of the United States of America.

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How does it come to pass that some civilizations are remembered more than others? Are they destined to be great, or are they made great because of the legacy they have left behind? While there have been great civilizations of the past, there has never been a civilization that left such a lasting legacy as the Romans, specifically during the Roman Republic. The Roman Republic dates approximately 753 to 27 B.C. Many precedents formed during this time would prove to last a lifetime. The Roman Republic continues to stand, well after its demise, as an example of determination and purpose.

In order to have an accurate understanding of the present day circumstances, it is imperative that men have an extensive knowledge of their origins and history. When faced with the daunting task of the construction and formation of a working government, the founding fathers of America, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Samuel Adams, all looked to the one civilization they knew held the answers to making America not just a nation, but a living legacy. Many countries influenced the founder during this time, such as Great Britain and Greece. However, Rome provided insight in many areas, both social and political.

A fusion of ideology and symbolism characterizes the relationship formed between Rome and America. These two nations were born in the same manner, a violent rejection of the government which ruled over them. This continued to give them a wariness concerning the abuse of power from either the government or the uneducated masses.¹ Although America has become an example of diplomacy, democracy, and

¹ Thomas F. Madden, *How Rome Built – and America is building – and Empire of Trust*, (New York: Penguin Group Inc., 2008), 37.

determination, these principles did not simply come into existence at the start of the eighteenth century. While there were many avenues for inspiration, the founding fathers looked to the Roman Republic to form the nation and government that would provide support and structure for the people. The American government, philosophy, military, religion, everyday life, and lastly, the Roman symbols immersed in American culture show the influence of the Roman Republic. Because of these influences, the ideology of the Roman Republic studied in history textbooks remains alive through its amalgamation into the United States.

The topic concerning the Roman-American relationship receives a wide variety of attention ranging from those who insist that America is the New Rome to those who argue that America learned from Rome. Thomas Madden conducts such a study in his work, *Empires of Trust: How Rome Built □ □ □ □ and America is building □ □ □ □ an Empire of Trust*. In his review of the influence between Rome and America, Madden concludes that both countries stand as separate entities, and while America shares many similarities with Rome, she remains unique in several aspects, such as innovation and entrepreneurship. Likewise, Cullen Murphy in *Are We Rome?* offers a critical analysis of the affiliation of Rome and America. Murphy states that America has the potential to walk the destructive path of the Romans, but also has the power to create for herself a new identity and future.² Conversely, former U.S. Congressman Tom Tancredo argues in his book *In Mortal Danger* that America and Rome share a closer link than most are willing to admit. Tancredo believes that a key similarity between the two nations lies in

² Keith Anderson, "Rome and America," Probe Ministries, http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.5187643/k.9C3F/Rome_and_America.htm (accessed March 18, 2012).

the lack of civic merit within its citizens. While Tancredo offers hope for an alternate ending concerning America, he drives home the point that up until now, America has followed in Rome's footsteps.

While the similarities that exist between Rome and America exist, they remain just that, similarities. Characteristics such as freedom for all, technological advances, creativity, economic prosperity, and social equality highlight a few of the several differences between the two nations.³ With the presupposition that America learned and grew from the Roman ways, one can obtain a greater knowledge of these similarities without jumping to the hasty conclusion that the nations became as one.

The United States and Rome share many of the same attitudes towards power and acceptance. A common distrust of concentrated power was a fear instilled by the Romans into the hearts of the American people. The founding fathers, apprehensive of centralized power, carefully organized the American government with a system of checks and balances between powers.⁴ The development of the United States government will be discussed in more detail later on.

Another way in which Roman ideology infiltrated the American attitude concerns the concept of embracing various cultures to allow for the growth and expansion of ideas, which led to an increase in unity. Just as Rome did not produce a new culture or identity, but brought together many cultures to form an identity, America followed in kind. America picked up the best memoirs of each culture and brings them together to form its

³ Ibid.

⁴ James McClellan, *Liberty, Order, and Justice: An Introduction to the Constitutional Principles of American Government* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund Inc., 2000), 19.

identity. This illustrates one of the many reasons why America received the name “The Melting Pot of the World.”⁵

In addition to Roman ideology, Roman symbolism pervaded its way into the American society. This integration occurred in many different ways ranging from words to currency. The symbol of America, the great eagle, was also an ancient symbol of the power and strength of Rome.⁶ All thirteen original states’ seals included Roman imagery and/or Latin inscriptions.⁷ Specifically, the seals of Virginia and Georgia are from Virgil’s *First Eclogue*, *Deus nobis haec otia fecit*, “God has made this tranquility for us.”⁸ Even the Great Seal of the United States, which is supposed to set apart the nation as unique is drenched in Roman imagery. The olive branch is the Roman symbol for peace. The eagle, already mentioned above, carried a scroll with the Latin description, *E pluribus unum*, “Out of many, One.”⁹

Fascism and statism serve as two examples of American words tracing their origins back to the Roman concepts. The word fascism comes from the Roman word *fascis*. *Fascis* were wooden rods tied together with colorful bands which symbolized control under one government. The ax in the *fascis* made the people aware of what would happen if one did not adhere to the power at hand.¹⁰ The idea that there existed no higher law than the government’s law arose from the Romans’ implementation of the concept of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Madden, 32.

⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰ Edith Hamilton, *The Roman Way* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), 45.

statism. The Constitution of the United States echoes this belief by claiming the Constitution to be the supreme law of the land. Additionally, the reverence for the law shows statism in action throughout the United States.¹¹

Many American coins carry Roman sayings or symbols. Roman beliefs also greatly inspired early American currency as well. The first federal currency bills in America depicted the Roman goddess, *Justicia*, carrying her scales and sword showed.¹² The Roman goddess, *Libertas*, also pictured on early currency, wore her cap and rod. The Roman phrase, *sic floret res publica*, meaning, “Thou shall flourish in the Republic,” served as a reminder of Roman influence on American thought.¹³ Early American coins had the head of a Roman depicted on one side because the early founders did not wish to have the king of England on their coins. Also written on these early coins, the Roman inscription, *non vi virtute vici*, meaning, “I triumph by virtue, not force,”¹⁴ On American dollar bills today, one can also see the reflection of Rome. Aside from the unfinished pyramid, nearly every phrase lends itself to an investigation of Roman concepts. The words over the pyramid, *Annuet coeptis*, “He approves of the undertaking,” are from Virgil’s *Aeneid*.¹⁵ The words under the pyramid, *Novus ordo Seclorum*, meaning, “A new order of the ages,” also from Virgil’s *Fourth Eclogue*, highlight the importance America placed on incorporating Rome into their country.¹⁶ At a time when the founding fathers

¹¹Roland Muller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Pennsylvania: Xlibris Co., 2000), 34.

¹²Madden, 33.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 34.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

could have written anything on their new nation's currency, they chose to intentionally link the United States with one of the greatest republics of the ancient world.

The mindset of the Roman people functioned as another important aspect of everyday life within the Roman Republic. This attitude remained wary, yet accepting at the same time. The Romans stayed cautious of a concentrated power due its volatility. They endured much violence, and this can be most clearly shown through the struggle for power.¹⁷ Because of this, the Romans were apprehensive of those who sought to claim all of the power for themselves. The people needed to know that their leaders sought to protect and provide for them. Conversely, they were very accepting of new cultures and ideas. The people living under Roman rule believed that embracing new cultures, rather than expelling them, would help to create unity among the people. This especially related to those nations who found themselves under Roman control.¹⁸ While there were certain Roman expectations of these nations, such as taxes and enrollment in the Roman army, for the most part the government allowed the nations to operate on their own. The Romans would incorporate the best from each of its conquered lands into the Roman identity. The integration of the Greek religion into Roman life served as an example of this fusion of beliefs and practices.¹⁹

In addition to the attitude of the people, the humble beginnings of the Roman people tended to be overlooked. The family served as the central source of influence over

¹⁷ Andrew W. Lintott, *Violence in Republican Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 67.

¹⁸ Richard E. Smith, *The Failure of the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 20.

¹⁹ Robert Morstein-Marx and Nathan Rosenstein, eds., *A Companion to the Roman Republic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 221.

the children. This unit provided the opportunity to inundate the children with exposure to several key factors including education, the religious beliefs, the values, and the sense of honor that would remain with the children their entire lives.²⁰ The earliest Romans specifically relied on this sense of family and dependence upon one another.

One of the common professions for these early Roman citizens was farming. While humble in origins, these Romans developed into strong men and women who understood hard work and honor. Cato the Elder reflected on this very concept when he said, “It is from the farmers that the bravest men and sturdiest soldiers come...their calling is most highly respected, their livelihood is most assured.”²¹ This showed not only the physical strength of the farmers, but the respect which they were given as well.

The life of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, also known as Cincinnatus, represented an example of the quintessential early Roman citizen. In 458 B.C. when Rome needed a leader, Cincinnatus rose to the occasion and led the Roman people back to stability. The power of dictator was bestowed upon him with which to accomplish this very task of stabilization of the republic. Instead of taking advantage of the power, Cincinnatus fulfilled his duty and promptly returned to his farm to complete his duties there as well. The Roman historian Livy describes Cincinnatus this way, “Cincinnatus, the family farmer who busied himself with his own affairs [on the farm] until his country called him away to service.”²² Livy goes on to say that when the Senate asked him to command the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Marcus Porcius Cato, *On Agriculture*, trans. William Davis Hooper and Harrison Boyd Ash, Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), preface.

²² Livy, 3.26.

army and receive the title of dictator, Cincinnatus immediately asked his wife Racilia to bring his toga to him, and he headed off to the city.²³

Like the Romans, the early Americans, both commoners and elite alike, also felt a strong sense of honor and duty. The founding fathers risked everything they owned, including their lives, for the sake of their new country. Many of the early Americans shared a bond with the Romans in that they were also farmers who understood the value of hard work and determination. The family, like the Romans, functioned as a team to accomplish the needed goals. Additionally these men were not just farmers, but they, when needed, became the minutemen and militia for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.²⁴ The Great Seal of the state of Delaware honored these men by showing a single man represented as a farmer and soldier.²⁵

George Washington, the typical Virginia farmer who rose to leadership because the timing demanded it, has been depicted as the modern Cincinnatus. In addition to similar characteristics, Washington became president of the Society of the Cincinnati, which consisted of former Continental officers who sought to spread the ideology and teachings of Cincinnatus.²⁶ In the Virginia State Capitol Building there is a statue of Washington carrying a walking stick in one hand, representing his love of nature and land, and Roman fasces in the other hand. The fasces links Washington to Cincinnatus because the latter also carried the fasces as he marched into Rome in 458 B.C. Behind the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Madden, 39.

²⁵ Ibid., 62.

²⁶ McClellan, 19.

statue of Washington stood his plow, waiting for the hero's return to the land.²⁷ This depiction of Washington proved itself truthful in many ways. Washington, like Cincinnatus, had the opportunity to seize power, but refused. At the end of his second term as President of the United States, Washington opted to return his home in Mt. Vernon, Virginia.²⁸ Washington provided an example of a selfless leader who put the needs of his country before his own.

Education, another similarity between Rome and America, played an important role in the Roman Republic because it served as a way to transfer the beliefs, customs, and traditions to the younger generation. The Romans offered an education that led to success.²⁹ The first step in achieving this success was a reflection on past empires. The Romans wanted to educate their children as to what had worked and what had failed within each empire. Additionally, the Romans believed that a proper education consisted of an understanding of the language, government, and customs.³⁰ How could the Romans train their younger generation to take over for them if they had not been taught the laws and customs?

Two major types of education flourished in the republic. The early Roman education which lasted until 272 B.C. and the Hellenized education that continued from that time onward represent two vastly different styles of education. During the early period, informal education took place in the home. The parents, particularly the mother,

²⁷ Madden, 62.

²⁸ McClellan, 19.

²⁹ Ibid., 53.

³⁰ Matthew Bunson, *Encyclopedia of the Roman Empire* (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2002), 24.

accepted responsibility for the education of the children.³¹ Utilitarianism, the belief that actions are right if they are beneficial for the majority, remained extremely important in the educational system of Rome.³² The parents focused heavily on instilling their children with a sense of values and practicality. Due to Roman emphasis on practicality, students excelled at subjects such as law and medicine. Up until 272 B.C., education existed for the aristocratic, or patrician, families only.³³

Roman education underwent a change when Romans began to bring home Greek slaves to act as tutors for their families. Livius Adronics, also known as Livy (not to be confused with the historian) portrayed an example of this shift. Referred to as Rome's first schoolmaster because he translated Homer's *Odyssey* into Latin, Livy revolutionized Roman education. With tutors such as Livy, the education became much more Hellenized.³⁴ Rather than in the home, education took place in public arenas. Education became open to everyone, not just the patricians.

A shift from practical thought to literary thought highlighted one of the major changes during this time.³⁵ Many scholars believe this shift was due in a large part to the literary contributions of Livy. Rather than focusing on law and medicine as early Roman education had, Hellenized education focused on topics such as philosophy, fine arts and

³¹ Michael Grant, *History of Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979), 260.

³² Madden, 32.

³³ Ibid, 33.

³⁴ Dr. Mark Steinhoff, "Education in Ancient Rome" (Lecture presented in Roman Civilization at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, November 2010).

³⁵ Ibid.

recreation (gymnasium), music, and religion.³⁶ Students were encouraged to question their surroundings and beliefs. This stands in sharp contrast to the early educational system which taught to focus only on the concrete.

Like many countries, Americans have placed a premium on education. The early American educational system proved to be similar to the early Roman instruction. They focused on ancient civilizations and concrete truths, such as history.³⁷ The Americans, like the Romans, agreed that the family instilled many important principles. In addition to similar styles of education, the early Americans also studied the Romans. Donald Robertson, the personal instructor of James Madison, studied the education of Herodotus, Caesar, Tacitus, and other influential Romans. Robertson believed that much could be learned from these great men, and the life of Madison showed an appreciation of Roman ideology.³⁸ Noah Webster, who had a tremendous impact on American education, said the following concerning American education: “The minds of youth are perpetually led to the history of Greece and Rome...boys are constantly repeating declarations of Cicero.”³⁹

A drive to become successful has fueled the educational system in America, just as the drive for success and power drove Roman learning. Just as an understanding of Roman traits such as language, government, and customs proved imperative to becoming successful in the past, an understanding of the American language, government, and

³⁶ Madden, 44.

³⁷ Carl J. Richard, *Greeks and Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers*, 16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

regulations remain essential for current success.⁴⁰ English serves as the language of the business world. The American government offers stability and duplicated itself in many countries since its birth in the eighteenth century.⁴¹ American customs offer diversity as well as unification because of the incorporation of the various cultures represented.

The Roman government played a crucial role in the development and protection of the Roman Republic. The government was divided into two major stages. The first stage was referred to as the regal period, known as the reign of the seven kings. This represented a time in which the Etruscan kings from the north ruled over the Romans. The regal period lasted from 753-509 B.C. The last Etruscan king was Tarquinius Superbus.⁴² After the expulsion of the Etruscans, the Romans set about constructing a government. This marked the beginning of the second stage. The creation of a new government posed as a challenge due to the fact that the Romans had no written constitution.⁴³ At this time, the Romans set about to complete a task which none had successfully implemented, the creation of a republic.

The constitutional system of government showed a balance of three distinct governing styles: monarchic, oligarchic, and democratic.⁴⁴ The Romans divided the government into three branches: consuls, senate, and assemblies.⁴⁵ The position of consul

⁴⁰ Madden, 54.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² M. Cary, *A History of Rome: Down to the Reign of Constantine*, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1962), 49.

⁴³ Dr. Mark Steinhoff, "Government of the Roman Republic" (Class Lecture in Roman Civilization from Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, November 2010).

⁴⁴ Bunson, 16.

⁴⁵ Leon Homo, *Roman Political Institutions* (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1962), 32.

replaced the role of the former kings. To balance power, there existed two consuls who shared the authority.⁴⁶ These consuls, elected annually, could not be re-elected. They served as commanders of the Roman army and as enforcers of the law. Furthermore, they had the power to convene the senate and the assemblies when they saw fit. They also held veto power. In addition to legislative and militaristic roles, the consuls also represented the religious leadership of the Roman people.⁴⁷

Due to the magnitude of the position, the consuls appointed various positions to assist them in carrying out their tasks. The praetors, censors, quaestors, and aediles aided in easing the weighty position of the consuls. The praetors claimed responsibility for the supervision of justice. The censors oversaw the maintenance of the census. The quaestors served as low ranking magistrates who accounted for the treasury. Additionally, a quaestor could also serve the consul. Aediles saw to the maintenance of the temples and games.⁴⁸ In times of great need or emergency, consuls had the ability to pronounce themselves dictators. This allowed them six months to reign, undeterred, in the best interest of Rome. Cincinnatus stands as an example of a Roman dictator. While the term dictator developed a negative connotation, Cincinnatus proved to be an effective and benevolent leader to the people of Rome. He also proved himself to be neither thirsty for power nor prideful.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁷ Steinhoff, "Government of the Roman Republic."

⁴⁸ Grant, 68.

⁴⁹ Homo, 29.

The Senate, the second branch of the Roman government, existed as the most important center of the government because the Senators held lifelong positions.⁵⁰ Consisting of senior politicians, the Senate served as an advisory council. In fact, the word “senate” comes from the Latin word “old men.”⁵¹ While their official title read advisory, during the Roman Republic this remained factual only in theory. In all actuality, the Senate governed the people of Rome.⁵² While all free adult males were eligible for a senatorial seat, the power usually fell to those who had property which resulted in their candidates winning the elections.⁵³

The third and final branch consisted of the assemblies. The assemblies gave a political voice to the common people. While theoretically the assemblies remained sovereign, they tended to follow the leadership and example of the Senate.⁵⁴ The assemblies managed the selection and election of the two consuls every year. The dividing of the assemblies created separate *comitia*, or committees. The *Comitia Centuriata* consisted of centuries that regulated the election of censors, declared war, and ratified census results. It also served as the highest appeal court on particular cases. The *Comitia Tributa* consisted of thirty-five tribes. These tribes were created by geographic divisions. The *Comitia Tributa* also elected quaestors, aediles, and tribunes. Lastly, the *Comitia Curiate* included only patrician members.⁵⁵ Family heritage remained

⁵⁰ Steinhoff, “Government of the Roman Republic.”

⁵¹ Isaac Asimov, *The Roman Republic* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), 17.

⁵² Steinhoff, “Government of the Roman Republic.”

⁵³ Grant, 69.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

responsible for the division of these members. After a revolution, known as the “Struggle of the Orders” between the patricians and plebeians, the *Comitia Curiate* integrated plebeians into its committee. They would also act as an appeals court as needed.⁵⁶

As previously mentioned, the “Struggle of the Orders” had a tremendous impact on the reshaping of Roman government and law. This struggle depicted the growing contention between two groups: the patricians and the plebeians.⁵⁷ Patricians accounted for a small amount of aristocratic Roman citizens (less than ten percent) who owned land and were legally, and socially, superior to the plebeians. The plebeians, citizens who did not have any authoritative power of their own, remained helpless under the power of the patricians. The plebeians ranged from landless peasants to wealthy individuals who desired to become patricians.⁵⁸ In 494 B.C., the plebeians desired to free themselves from the unfair restraints of Rome and created their own independent state in which they had a voice. Eventually, the Senate modified the Roman constitution to allow for some of the demands of the plebeians.⁵⁹ First, the plebeians obtained the right to elect two tribunes. This proved to be a great victory for the plebeians as the tribunes had ultimate veto authority and remained unanswerable for their actions. Additionally, in 450 B.C., the creation of the Twelve Tables pronounced the written code of laws for the land. This served as an achievement for the plebeians because up until this time, the plebeians did

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Lintott, 24.

⁵⁸ Asimov, 30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 31.

not know the law, and their ignorance often landed them in trouble.⁶⁰ The table overviewed the rights and procedures of the people rather than providing an extensive list of the laws. The Twelve Tables also freed the plebeians from enslavement for debt. Perhaps one of the most influential changes remained the decree that one consul must be a plebeian. This guaranteed that the plebeians had a voice in the consul.⁶¹

Just as the Romans were the first to develop a tri-fold government, the founding fathers of America also sought to break from tradition when forming their government. Although the founders drew heavily from the English system, the Roman government also proved to be a source of influence. While America had a very unique government, including the production of the first written constitution, the government relied heavily on outside sources during its formation. The rebirth of Roman ideology also came during the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Beliefs such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, can be traced back to the previously mentioned struggle of the Roman people. During the eighteenth century many of the founders were extremely well versed in Roman history. The education of their day focused on world history and exemplified the struggle of the Roman people.⁶² Many of the founding fathers came to admire the republicanism that existed during the Roman Republic. When debating the Constitution, the pamphlets dispersed by those in favor of the Constitution, known as the Federalists, and those who opposed it, known as the Anti-federalists argued for the above mentioned beliefs of life, liberty, and happiness. In order to conceal their identities many of the

⁶⁰ Ibid, 33.

⁶¹ Cary, 77-79

⁶² McClellan, 16.

writers disguised themselves under pseudonyms such as “Marcus,” “Cato,” “Publius,” “Cicero,” “Lucius,” “Junius,” and “Brutus.”⁶³

When constructing the new government, the founding fathers looked to Rome as one of its sources of inspiration. When drafting the three branches of government, the founding fathers looked to the threefold government system of Rome previously discussed. James Madison, the writer of the Virginia Plan and an influential leader in the Continental Congress, drew many of his ideas from the beliefs and writings of Seneca, Cicero, and Polybius concerning how to build a government with the positives of the Roman Republic but without its obvious shortcomings.⁶⁴ Despite Madison drawing from the inspiration of the Romans, he intentionally strove to make the new American government not appear as though it walked in the steps of a republic which ultimately crumbled. Madison desired for the new government to stand the test of time. The unpredictability, violence, and “turbulent democracies,” remained in Madison’s opinion, “as unfit for the imitation, as they are repugnant to the genius of America.”⁶⁵ While Madison adamantly argued that the newly created United States of America existed nothing like the fallen Roman Republic, the influences remained all the same.⁶⁶

John Adams saw Cicero as the ultimate leader, and he believed that the Roman constitution formed from the “noblest people and the greatest power that as ever

⁶³ Madden, 37.

⁶⁴ Benson J. Lossing, *Lives of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence* (Texas: WallBuilders Press, 2007), 35.

⁶⁵ McClellan, 16.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

existed.”⁶⁷ As noted, Washington willingly gave up his power for the betterment of America emphasized the need for selfless leaders, like Cincinnatus, particularly in his Newburgh address.⁶⁸ These men, well versed in Roman history, knew what had succeeded in the Roman government, and they attempted to adapt the new government to a system that had proved itself, but not before making a few modifications, just as the Romans always had done.

The founding fathers realized that one of the reasons for the fall of Rome rested within the inequality of power across the board.⁶⁹ While checks in power remained in place throughout the Roman government, this system crumbled because one branch had more power, so checks only lasted for so long. The military became too powerful because the Romans depended on it too much, and thus the military nullified any of the checks that currently restricted its power. The founders sought to correct this mistake by implementing a stronger system; checks and balances placed on each of the three branches of government equally ensured that no one branch could rule over the others.⁷⁰

The Romans were well known for their ability to conquer a nation and integrate certain customs and social norms into everyday life. One of the empires that influenced the Romans the most was the Greek empire. At the time when the Romans invaded the Greeks, Stoicism and other philosophies thrived. The Romans saw the strength that stoicism gave to the Greeks, so instead of casting it to the side, they embraced, modified,

⁶⁷ Madden, 35.

⁶⁸ Richard, 101.

⁶⁹ Polybius, *Histories*, trans. W.R. Paton, Loeb Classical Library, 6 vols., (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922-1927), 6.56.6.

⁷⁰ Richard, 86.

and presented it to the people.⁷¹ The Romans, firm believers of fate and will, added these beliefs to the newly created Stoicism. In the Greek way of life, philosophy remained the chief aim. Everything somehow had philosophical beliefs integrated into its foundation.

The Romans also integrated philosophy into history. The idea of spreading moral and ethical lessons through the platform of history became the driving purpose behind many historians such as Titus Livius, also known as Livy.⁷² Philosophy served as more than just an occupation or passion; it developed into a way of life. Plutarch went as far to say concerning men such as Cato, philosophy, became “a complete obsession.”⁷³ This explains why the Romans idolized such men as Seneca, Caesar, Cicero, and Marcus Aurelius, also known as the Philosopher King.⁷⁴ Roman philosophy did not die when Rome fell, but rather it lived on through the lives of its devout followers. Cicero, for example, continued to be widely read throughout most of the middle ages. During the Renaissance, popularity once again rose for republican ideology.⁷⁵

America has always had a special appreciation for intellectualism. Philosophy elevated certain men during the Revolutionary Era in America, and continues to do so today, under the façade of science and law. Some of the same laws that governed stoicism in Rome were instituted in American society today. America believes in fate as

⁷¹ Dr. Mark Steinhoff, “Roman Religion” (Lecture presented in Roman Civilization at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, November 2010).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Plutarch, *Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library, 9 vols., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968-84), 22:2-3.

⁷⁴ Dr. Mark Steinhoff, “Roman Philosophy” (Lecture presented in Roman Civilization at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, November 2010).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

well as the need for a rationale mindset. In American society, the search for rationalism continues to be on the forefront in the scholarly world.

The Roman Republic, while now recognized as massive, powerful, and a government that dominated its time, did not start out with the mindset of conquering land. Rome desired stability, peace, and independence and thought that an isolationist policy would best achieve these goals.⁷⁶ They did not wish to go to war with their neighboring countries just for the sake of their land. Marcus Tullius Cicero, also known as Cicero, demonstrated this ideology when he said, “There remained two ways of settling a dispute: first, by discussion; second, by physical force; and since the former is characteristic of man, and the latter of the brute, we must resort to force only in case we may not avail ourselves of discussion. The only excuse, therefore, for going to war is that we may live in peace unharmed.”⁷⁷ To prevent this, the Senate passed a law which prohibited Rome from going to war unless Rome, or one of her allies, suffered an attack. Cicero also credited Rome’s greatness with its allegiance to its allies when he said, “By defending our allies our people have gained the whole world.”⁷⁸ Roman allies also on many occasions would seek aid from Rome because of its power and force.⁷⁹

Rome’s desire for peace far outweighed its desire for bloodshed. However, as history can attest, this peace remained unattainable without the use of force, and so, the Romans, forced to step out of their peace in order to secure peace for the people, resolved

⁷⁶ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De officiis*, trans. Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), I: 34-35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Madden, 78.

to do so. The turning point for the Roman Republic was the Gallic Sack in 390 B.C. This assault resulted in a drastic cry from the people to never again let such an attack occur. The securing of the homeland developed into the highest goal for the Romans and gave them the motivation to grant peace for the following generations. The well-trained and organized army became the avenue in which this mindset converted into actuality.

The army unified the people of Rome. During the Roman Republic, the army clearly portrayed a high level organization and strength. Those who served in the army were disciplined and courageous. The Romans took pride in their army and considered it a great honor to serve. Their enemies came to fear them and their allies to love them. The title “Friend of Rome” became a coveted concept because it meant that one’s country had the support and backing of the Roman army.⁸⁰ The title also gave the countries trust that the Romans would adhere to their alliances because it refused to dishonor itself by doing anything else. Honor played an important role in the army. The Pax Romana proved a testament to the trust that other nations had in the Roman Republic. While the Pax Romana did not bring an end to all wars, it portrayed the idea that Rome could be trusted to protect the truth.⁸¹

The machine-like warfare of the army fueled their ambitious conquest of the known world. Livy persisted that the military serve as the ultimate reason for the continued existence of the Roman Republic.⁸² The largest army controlled the land. Rome discovered the difficulty in maintaining the disciplinary and control when the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 196.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Livy, 2.1.

territory under the Romans greatly expanded. This led to a shift in power to the control of the leader of the army. Rulers such as Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar rose to power because of their use of the military to their strategic political advantage.

Similarly to the Romans, the United States of America sought to obtain peace from refraining from foreign disputes. This warning revealed itself in George Washington's Farewell Address where he warned the new country about becoming entangled in foreign affairs.⁸³ The isolationist policy followed by the United States, specifically in times of war, remained until the twentieth century. During World War I, the United States stayed out of the war until it endured a threat by Germany via the Zimmerman Telegram. It then entered the war, defeated the enemy, and sought to return peace to the world. Like the Romans, the actions of the United States revealed that it had no desire for bloodshed and war. In World War II, the United States did not enter the war until it was attacked by the Japanese Empire on December 7, 1941. The entry for the war demonstrated the desire of the United States to keep its land free and secure. Like the Romans, the United States built its empire out of the necessity to keep peace.

Freedom for religion served as one of the reasons the Romans desired peace. Religion played an important role in the lives of the Romans. It is important to note that while religion was not a required force in the Roman Republic, it was not prevented or halted in any way (as long as the practices were aligned with the law). Many, including Polybius, felt as though religion was good for a country because it provided its people with a set of rules and moral framework for their lives. This idea that Romans lives were bettered by the faith that religion requires is illustrated through Polybius when he argued:

⁸³ George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford, 14 vols, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889) 13:316.

The quality of the Roman republic is most distinctively superior is in my opinion the nature of its religious convictions. I believe that it is the very thing which among other people is an object of reproach, I mean superstition, which maintains the cohesion of the Roman state...For this reason, I think, not that the ancients acted rashly and haphazardly in introducing among the people notions concerning the gods and beliefs in the terrors of hell, but that modern people are most rash and foolish in banishing such beliefs....⁸⁴

Polybius firmly believed that the religion not only defined the character of the man, but also aided to the nation's future successes because it gave the men something for which to fight.⁸⁵

Because of the absorption of so many cultures into the Roman Republic, there was not one particular religion or god that was worshipped. Instead, there was a limitless number of gods.⁸⁶ The Roman religion was not a static religion, and as more lands were conquered, more gods were added to the religious temples.⁸⁷ Roman religion was also not exclusive. Devotion to one god did not mean that all other gods were ignored. The diversity of gods led to the creation of cults which focused on the worship of one particular god or goddess. One of the most famous was the Cult of Isis. This cult worshipped the goddess Isis, who, according to legend, raised her husband from the dead, and remained focused on a fascination with magic and secrets.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Polybius 6.56.6

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Smith, 19.

⁸⁷ Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein, eds., 221.

⁸⁸ W. Warde Fowler, *Social Life at Rome* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933), 332.

The plethora of gods and goddesses that the Romans worshipped raised the question, why so many gods? The answer became two-fold. Firstly, the Romans desired to control the natural forces through the appeasement of the gods. The Roman phrase *pax decorum*, or peace of the gods, stood as important concept which infiltrated their religious practices.⁸⁹ A variety of rituals accomplished this task. The Roman rituals demonstrated their legalistic mindset. Many Romans did not even know why they performed the rituals, but just that they must perform them in order to please the gods.⁹⁰ In fact, the word “religion” comes from the word “religare” which means to bind.⁹¹ The Romans saw their rituals as a binding agreement of peace with the gods. The Romans focused on orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy. They believed that the right practice was more important than the right religion.⁹² An example of the Romans not fully understanding the meaning behind their gods revealed itself in Paul’s address to the Romans in Acts. While this happened after the Roman Republic had already ended, the altar to the unknown god, the God of Abraham, illustrated the mindset of the Roman people.⁹³ Secondly, the Romans became very legalistic so they sought to include as many gods as possible. This allowed them to maintain peace with all known gods.

Rome’s unique attitude toward Christianity aided its rapid growth. While many Christians shy away from the idea that their religion had anything to do with the pagan

⁸⁹ Steinhoff, “Roman Religion.”

⁹⁰ Smith, 21.

⁹¹ Dr. Mark Steinhoff, “Pleasures and Excesses of Daily Life” (Lecture presented in Roman Civilization at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, November 2010).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

society of Rome, Rome's structure remained essential to Christianity's spread.⁹⁴ The tolerant nature of the Roman government toward religion allowed for the initial birth and growth of Christianity. Christianity appealed to the Romans because it satisfied many of the physiological and psychological needs of the people such as safety, security, fellowship, redemption, justice, morality, and ethics.⁹⁵

Several key Roman leaders aided, intentionally or not, in the growth and understanding of Christianity. Tertullian, who first developed a code for systematic theology, was a lawyer involved in interpreting Roman law. These legal concepts helped Tertullian lay out the basis for Christian systematic theology.⁹⁶ Augustine was born into the home of a Roman official and educated in the Roman way of life. Augustine's writings reflect the philosophy of the Romans, and remained uncontested for their level of impact in the Christian world.⁹⁷ Additionally, Ambrose, educated in Roman Republican law, became the Bishop of Milan in 374 A.D. Above all, Ambrose focused on his training in the Roman law which helped to enforce his views concerning the concepts of guilt and righteousness.⁹⁸ Emperors such as Domitian and Nero who aggressively persecuted the Christian church did not intend to help further this "rebellion." However, this persecution helped to weed out those who were not genuine in their Christian faith. Additionally, the persecutions helped to spread the idea of a heavenly focus, rather than a

⁹⁴ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 210.

⁹⁵ Steinhoff, "Roman Religion."

⁹⁶ Everett Ferguson, *Background to Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 19-21.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁹⁸ Green, 214.

focus on the temporal world.⁹⁹ On the flipside, emperors such as Justinian and Constantine promoted Christianity and allowed for an explosive growth under their reigns.¹⁰⁰

Religion in America has traces back to Rome's involvement with religion. Like Rome, modern America has a tolerant view towards religion, as long as the religious practices do not infringe on any laws. The acceptance of Mormonism, but the refusal to accept polygamy serves an example of this limited acceptance. The current focus on the afterlife in the teachings of Christianity owes itself, in part, to the Roman fascination with the afterlife.¹⁰¹ The Romans wanted to know what happened after they died, and many feared death because of their ignorance.¹⁰² This encouraged Christians to be extremely vocal about their beliefs in the afterlife.

The epistle of Romans in the Christian Bible also shows the inspiration of the Roman culture. This letter remains today as one of the most popular books in the New Testament, especially when presenting the Gospel to an unbeliever. The likeminded mindset between Americans and Romans serves as the reason for its effectiveness at reaching people for Christ. The Americans, like the Romans, have a guilt-based culture that constantly searches for something to add meaning to their lives.¹⁰³ Romans presents the gospel in a way that convicts the sinner and offers hope and healing. This idea of

⁹⁹ Ferguson, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 24-25.

¹⁰¹ Ferguson, 36.

¹⁰² Steinhoff, "Roman Religion."

¹⁰³ Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004), 97.

acceptance represents a common need among all men. Just as the early Romans acquired this acceptance from the various religious cults, so many Americans have found acceptance through religion as well.

The founding fathers knew the key to remaining resolved lay in the adaption and incorporation of Christianity. The Constitution demonstrates this incorporation. John Adams expressed the belief that God remained the foundation of his country when he said, “Our Constitution was made only for the moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”¹⁰⁴ Benjamin Franklin, recognized God as a higher power and maintained that one should seek to live a virtuous life.¹⁰⁵ In addition, Thomas Jefferson made it clear that liberty and life came from the Lord. He went on to say that without the Lord, “these liberties are null and void.”¹⁰⁶ Lastly, George Washington, in his Farewell Address, believed likewise when he said, “reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”¹⁰⁷ Adams, Franklin, Jefferson, and Washington all expressed the foundational belief that the health of the new nation relied on a belief in God, and that God in turn, believed in the future of their nation.

The American people have drawn many things from the Roman Republic over the years including ideology about the everyday life of its people, government, law, philosophy, military, and religion. Roman influence is also illustrated in the everyday

¹⁰⁴ John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, 10 vols., (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1850-1856), 9:228.

¹⁰⁵ Madden, 53-54.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 9 vols. (Washington D.C: Taylor and Maury, 1853-1854), 8:404.

¹⁰⁷ Washington, 13:308.

lives of Americans. Many things Americans do, say, and use have Roman ties to them. While many consider America to be the new Rome of this era, it is imperative that America guard itself against pride, greed, a lust for power, and a corrupt people, which are just the things which caused the Romans to fall out of favor with the Lord. Without the Lord's blessing, a nation cannot and will not thrive or even survive for long. America has learned from the great Roman civilization, but many lessons still wait to be learned, to hearts that are open and receptive to the warnings it holds. Rome did not fall in a day, but nevertheless, it fell.

Madison said in *Federalist 63* that America was not intended to be a carbon copy of Rome. With this assumption set in place, one can then gain an unbiased and factual understanding of the true correlation between the Roman Republic and the United States of America. The Roman Republic's government, while obviously flawed, offered much to be considered. The idea of having a government in which a man, no matter what his wealth, could be in some way represented, appealed greatly to the founders of America. Additionally, the Romans' study of philosophy created a basis for America to duplicate. The values shown forth in the Roman military such as structure, organization, and unification are also mirrored in the American military. Rome's adaption and tolerance of religion is reproduced through America's acceptance of religion. Additionally, Rome housed Christianity's birth, growth, and development into a religion that would influence the founding fathers of America. The Roman Republican mindset outlasted the republic through its penetration into the everyday lives of Americans. This includes the attitude and education of American citizens. Lastly, the symbols used in connection with Rome pervaded into American culture as well.

Perhaps the greatest way in which Rome can serve to the United States is as an example of what could be. Rome also offers plenty of warning to those who diligently search through history to gain wisdom and understanding for the future. Close examination of this great civilization will show the ramifications of greed, lust for power, immorality, violence, and stretching itself too thin militarily. To avoid Rome's fate, America would be wise to heed these warnings.

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