

The Twilight of Liberty: Lessons for the United States from Rome's Dying Republic

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Abstract

The United States of America has been a unique case in governance and history since its founding. At their inception, its institutions and framing ideals were radical, even revolutionary, and representative democracy, today widespread, was largely foreign to the world. As the progenitor of this new stage of global politics that would usher in democratic regimes across continents, it could be said that America is at the forefront of history. This prospect, however, is an alarming one. With international democracy being a recent development, and America being one of, if not the most longstanding, this presents a problem: there are relatively few fitting historical examples from which to derive guidelines for the good maintenance of this republic. With internal conflict appearing ever on the rise, in turn, this search for sound historical clues to avoiding the fate of bygone nations should only become more desperate. Liberty and the Rule of Law, two precious but fragile lodestones of the nation, must be preserved, but the question is how to do so in a changing world. A historical inquiry leaves one republic in particular that Americans can perhaps draw the clearest parallels and practical lessons from: Rome. A review of the histories of both nations indicate a common course; a review of the guiding laws and institutions of each indicate common systems and values, and regrettably; a review America's current state against that of Rome at the fall of the republic should indicate cause for alarm. All is not lost, however, for with time and lessons wrought from the great minds of Rome and America, the society and institutions of the nation can be rectified and collapse perhaps averted.

Introduction

Republican government is an exception in the history of global politics. Few republics flourished between the dawn of civilizations and the modern era, and even fewer great republics. Furthermore, the present international order of representative governments is a very recent phenomenon, and republicanism on an international scale is equally novel and experimental. Therefore, the future of republicanism is ever uncertain, with lessons for its preservation scarce. Questions of how republics rise and fall are ever on the minds of political theorists, for it is through populace and policy that nations wither or thrive. For a great republic then, like the United States, there appears to be little historical precedence with which to analyze trends and make predictions about a future political course. There is an exception to this, however. The most logical nation in history to compare politically with the United States is the Roman Republic. As Rome and the United States share common elements in their histories, and trends in the United States seem to be mirroring those of the time of the Roman Republic's fall, it may prove prudent to find the solutions to avoiding Rome's fate in the lessons of the Republic's great political minds.

Common Foundations

To make any claim about the concurrent states of late-republican Rome and the contemporary United States, and prescriptions thereupon, their historical commonalities must first be established. These commonalities, in fact, ring clearly throughout Roman and American histories, right back to each republic's founding. For centuries, the fledgling Rome was ruled over by their neighbors on the Italian peninsula: the Etruscans. Monarchical and expansionist, the Etruscans held vast swaths of Italy circa the 600's B.C., and the proliferation of their culture is well represented in how much was later borrowed by the Romans.¹ Once a minor settlement, by the mid-sixth century, Rome had grown into a large, bustling city comparable with those of Ancient Greece. Like the Greek city-states, Rome found itself under the dominion of increasingly odious tyrants, in the form of the Etruscan kings.² Accounts of the last king over Rome, Tarquinius Superbus, relate that he "abused his power, plundered the treasury for personal benefit, personally initiated and decided capital cases, and exiled citizens before confiscating their property."³ Strains on the state were further exacerbated by expansionist policy, including conflict with neighboring Gabii and Ardea during Tarquinius' reign. More despicable in the eyes of Romans, however, was Livy's account that Tarquinius was overthrown due to the affront caused by his son raping Lucretia, the wife of Collatinus, who in turn conspired against the king to form the republic with other nobles.⁴ In any case, the circumstance of Rome's founding was one of an increasingly tyrannical monarch lording over a realm of expanding size and diverging interests, until intolerable policy brought about revolution to form a republic.

This description mirrors the rise of the American republic in many respects. Several thousand years after Rome threw off the tyranny of the Etruscan Tarquinius, the thirteen American colonies of Great Britain threw off the yoke of King George III and declared themselves a similarly independent republic. Even the dissent of the American founders rang

¹ Celia E. Schultz et al, *A History of the Roman People* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2019), 21-23, 30-35.

² *Ibid.*, 77.

³ Walter Signorelli, *Rome and America: The Great Republics* (Bloomington, IN: Archway Publishing, 2018), 3.

⁴ Schultz, *History of the Roman People*, 77.

with that of their Roman counterparts, with the American Declaration of Independence decrying the manner in which the king “obstructed the administration of justice, made judges dependent on his will alone, imposed taxes without representation, and deprived citizens of their right to trial by jury.”⁵ Much as the British sought to consolidate their faltering hold on the American colonies, so too did Tarquinius rally his Etruscan allies to reconquer Rome and return to power. Like George III, however, who sent 80,000 regulars and mercenaries to maintain his dominion, the Etruscans were held at bay.⁶ Neither Rome nor America would allow the resurgence of old monarchies; they would have republics.

Constitutions of Rome and America

More intriguing, however, were the similar debates and notions that went into the drafting of what became each nation’s constitution. Rome, like the United States, came to the trouble of the executive, seeking a body simultaneously neither ineffective nor overly powerful. For this reason, Rome established the consulship, a pair of executives with sweeping military, judicial, and legislative proposal powers that were elected annually and each had full veto power over the other.⁷ America, facing the same issue, opted for a singular, more limited presidency divested of the role of proposing legislation and acting as the judiciary, but elected to four-year terms, maintaining military control as commander-in-chief, able to appoint federal judges, and maintaining the veto.⁸

Legislative balance was equally important among the republics as well. Even before Rome became a republic, the Senate existed as a body of prominent and experienced men tasked with advising the king. With the overthrow of the king, the Senate retained much of its former functionality. Nominally only an advisory body, the Senate came to oversee military assignments, provincial governments, foreign affairs, and the treasury. Being comprised of the leading political men of its day, though rulings were mere decrees, they carried significant weight and were seldom ignored. The Senate was, however, invariably aristocratic, and clamor for more popular representation grew. The *comitia centuriata*, based on military service and organization, was another pre-republican body maintained after Tarquinius’ fall, and, representing more of the populace, became the republic’s sovereign assembly. Popular sentiment, however, would not be so easily placated, and a dispute among Roman commoners (“*plebs*”) in a time of war led to a mass exodus of these *plebs* refusing military service and demanding their own sovereign body. This Council of the Plebs, as it became known, was a body enfranchising the commoners, and their leaders, known as Tribunes, were sworn to protect plebeian interests against excessive burdens levied by the military and senate.⁹

Quite similarly, the debate over legislative representation in the United States produced a bicameral legislature seeking to reconcile state or elite interests and common or popular interests. The United States House of Representatives mirrored the Roman Council of the Plebs in a number of respects. It is meant to be a larger body, meant to deliberate issues of the general public at large, and has great sway over revenue and impeachment bills, keeping these powers

⁵ Signorelli, *Rome and America*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁷ Schultz, *History of the Roman People*, 79.

⁸ Kevin L. Dooley & Joseph N. Patten, *Why Politics Matter: An Introduction to Political Science*, (Stamford, CT: Cengage, 2015), 168-170.

⁹ Schultz, *History of the Roman People*, 80-85.

close to the people. The two Senates also demonstrate certain parities. The U.S. Senate is a smaller body, formerly comprised of representatives elected by state legislatures over popular vote, which acts as a state-interest body with higher entry requirements and longer terms. The U.S. Senate likewise confirms presidential appointments and ratifies treaties in a foreign affairs role.¹⁰ In this way, the bicameral system creates a dual check on elitist aristocratic governance and unrestrained and inefficient rule by the masses, much as the Senate and Council did to balance *plebeian* and aristocratic interests in Rome.

Finally, much as the framers in the United States desired a Bill of Rights to guarantee the rights and protections held by citizens and states against the federal government, so too the Romans desire and craft the same in their Twelve Tables. The Twelve Tables acted as a means of codifying for the masses the preexisting legal traditions and customs formerly entrusted only to a privileged group. These laws guaranteed rights to property and testament, abolished the interrogation of free men using torture, and guaranteed the right to trial in cases that could lead to death. In short, the tables “established in principle the equality of all free citizens before the law.”¹¹ The parallel to the U.S. Bill of Rights is unmistakable, as it guarantees right to trial by jury, the protection of property from unwarranted seizure, the protection of expression, and protection from cruel and unusual punishments. In these documents, as well as the very frameworks of founding, the American and Roman Republics demonstrate parity, and their subsequent growth mirrors this.

Historical Parity

As powers expanding geographically and influentially, America and Rome likewise shared certain historical phenomena. Rome, having expelled its king and established a republic, sought to expand by alliance and conquest. War with the Latins left Rome with new cities under its jurisdiction, with many given full or partial citizenship in Rome’s government. So too did Rome expand against hostile tribes: the Gauls in the north, and later Germanics. To hem together this growing republic, Rome built impressive roads and infrastructure. In these newly connected and conquered towns, Roman colonists were sent to work farmland to furnish Roman garrisons and supply and were exempt from military service themselves.¹² The United States followed similar policies. Through war and purchase with Europeans and Native Americans, the fledgling republic also expanded outwards, creating territories that became full states. Land was apportioned in these new territories for American settlers to fan out westward across the continent.¹³ Linking these outposts, much like Roman roads, were bridges, canals, and later rail lines. Both republican Rome and America saw great territorial expansion in the years after their foundations, but international influence soon followed.

Both nations expanded not just across their geographical domains, but also onto the international stages of their time. America, expanding first throughout the continent, soon turned imperial in its expansionist policies. Defeating Spain, America subsumed many of the former power’s colonies as new territories and began to demonstrate great political pressure on nations in Latin America. The World Wars, in turn, brought the United States from a major power to a world power, and set the stage for an international community built alongside U.S. military

¹⁰ Dooley & Patten, *Why Politics Matter*, 125-133.

¹¹ Schultz, *History of the Roman People*, 88.

¹² Signorelli, *Rome and America*, 123-126.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 145-150.

hegemony.¹⁴ Rome, likewise, expanded by wars into the “world power” it was at its height. Uniting the Italian peninsula under its banner, much as America had done in continental North America, Rome also turned to offshore imperial expansion. Rome began with Syracuse, on the island of Sicily, and in doing so began the conflict with Carthage that would propel them to the hegemon of the Mediterranean. War with Carthage was tantamount to the World Wars in ancient history: great showdowns of nations and their allies over which would dominate the global system that proceeded. With the defeat of Carthage in three wars, culminating in its destruction, Rome was left having ascended to supremacy and holding an impressive array of overseas territories. Both republics had catapulted meteorically to prominence, but the effects of such were less grand: for Rome it meant the death of republicanism, for America the outcome remains in the balance.

Corruption

This parity, if sound, would place the United States in the same historical position as Rome on the eve of the fall of the Republic, a concept that bodes as poorly for the present hegemon as it did for that of antiquity. If this is the case, the same fatal flaws of late-republican Rome, outlined by its great political minds, would prove prevalent in America, and many seem to be. The first of these vices, and perhaps the most obvious, is corruption. To many today, corruption is best defined as “abuse of power for political gain,” and this sort of corruption has precedence in both American and Roman society.¹⁵ In the 2020 U.S. presidential election, both final candidates accused each other openly of profiting unjustly, either personally or through family, through the political system.¹⁶ In Rome, too, provincial governorships often led to extortion, as candidates tended increasingly to run up substantial debts campaigning. This, in turn, was often caused by large-scale bribery in campaigns so rampant as to merit the passage of so-called *ambitus* laws to curb such attempts to buy voters.¹⁷

To most Romans, however, political corruption was a vastly different concept, one far more hazardous to the republic. Rather than merely officials abusing power for personal gains, it came to mean the corruption of civic institutions and the populace rendering the rule of law inoperable. On this phenomenon, Cicero writes in *de Legibus*, “the entire civic community tends to be infected by the passions and vices of its leaders.”¹⁸ He believes that the aristocracy, wielding great influence in society, have become corrupted by vice and passion and so corrupt the people they represent and lead. Cicero, of course, placed the weight of this fault primarily, if not exclusively, on the upper aristocratic order, being himself a *patrician*. What is more interesting, however, that he is corroborated by the plebeian *popular* Sallust. Sallust expands further into condemning the decline of civil society. He holds a position, described by political theorist Peter Euben, that, “in a corrupt society each part pretends to be the whole; each interest to be the common one; each faction to make its views and voice exclusive.” Here, dialogue breaks down, and united national purpose splinters until, “the common good is seen as a ruse for

¹⁴ Ibid., 361.

¹⁵ Jed W. Atkins, *Roman Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 91.

¹⁶ “Joe Biden and Donald Trump: First Presidential Debate Transcript,” *USA Today*, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/09/30/presidential-debate-read-full-transcript-first-debate/3587462001/>

¹⁷ Atkins, *Roman Political Thought*, 91.

¹⁸ Ibid.

fools” and “the political arena becomes a place where factions, like gladiators, fight to the death.”¹⁹

Here, one sees a republican system of reason and shared virtues devolve into Cicero’s described demagoguery at the helm of Sallust’s warring factions who have abandoned truth and reconciliation to dominate each other. The American system is no stranger to these tendencies. Many political elections have become the realm of mudslinging and, more recently, the victory of big personalities, often heftily supported financially, over more nuanced and rationed candidates. Furthermore, media-fueled partisanship has led to the polarization of society into two increasingly radical camps that find growing difficulty in reaching compromise, let alone consensus, with each other. The fall in split ticket voting, opinions of the opposition, and even legislative voting trends speak to an increasingly rigid dichotomy.²⁰ Furthermore, the decreasing public faith in channels of information have made it harder for the populace to ascertain facts and make informed decisions based upon them.²¹ America, then, does not seem far from the Rome in which factions clashed, rather than cooperated, and in which the public’s view of common good was muddled to the point of a diminishing faith in legal institutions, and therefore the rule of law.

Institutional Breakdown

Likewise, with the corruption of public officials and the erosion of public discourse came deadlock, and an increasing view of then current rule of law as inadequate led to ‘solutions’ that destroyed longstanding institutions. The first shocks of the Roman republic’s demise came, ironically from the struggle of maintaining its conquests. Much like the United States, Rome was endlessly entangled in foreign affairs regarding its provinces and allies. J. A. Schumpeter wrote, “There was no corner of the known world where some interest was not alleged to be in danger or under actual attack. If the interests were not Roman, they were those of Rome’s allies; and if Rome had no allies, then allies would be invented.”²² These wars and conquests placed even greater strain on an ailing body politic, while the professional soldiery increasingly sided with partisan generals over the state. Military disloyalty to the republic even enabled the consul Sulla to march his army on Rome itself, unguarded by army or police force, twice in 88 B.C. Declaring emergency, he assumed the office of dictator for life, and drastically altered the Roman constitution in order to weaken the power of the plebeian tribunes (bolstering the elitist patrician senate), and hunting political enemies through proscription.²³

This violation of the constitution was ironically intended to preserve it, but failed to do so, and only escalated the issue. Moreover, *populares* forces were also chipping away at Rome’s constitution. The *popularis* tribune Tiberius Gracchus, and his brother Gaius, had attempted a radical departure decades prior by legislation, rather than by force. His scheme was a widely supported land reform act that would’ve broken up conquered public estates into small plots for landless farmers to balance growing aristocratic estates. The Gracchi argued that such would be crucial aid to the people. His bill, however, was only passed over the senate’s head when a

¹⁹ Ibid., 94.

²⁰ “Split-ticket districts, once Common, are now Rare,” *Pew Research Center*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/08/split-ticket-districts-once-common-are-now-rare/>

²¹ “Americans Remain Distrustful of Mass Media,” *Gallup*, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/321116/americans-remain-distrustful-mass-media.aspx>

²² Signorelli, *Rome and America*, 466.

²³ Atkins, *Roman Political Thought*, 24.

tribune set to vote against it was removed from office by Tiberius: an unprecedented upset. For this, Tiberius, though a sacrosanct tribune, was murdered in a riot, and his brother, attempting to revive the idea, met a similar fate.²⁴ By the 1st century A.D., however, the *populares* had taken these shortcomings and Sulla's own usurpation as recourse for violence in turn. In 63, Catiline, *popularis* consular loser to the famed Cicero, led his own army against Rome, acting much as Sulla had, though for the opposition²⁵.

All of this culminated with the rise of the Triumvirs: men promising to right the system and quell upheaval at the expense of the republican system itself, leading to empire. Julius Caesar led his army on Rome, defeated opposition, proclaimed himself dictator, and went about destroying Rome's political traditions at a whim. With his assassination on the Ides of March, the following power struggle would leave his great nephew, Augustus, at the helm. Augustus finalized the end of the republic, all while ironically proclaiming its salvation. He was deified and received extensive lifetime powers, called to order Rome's political bodies at his whim, retained command over Rome's armies, and exercised unlimited veto. He was, in principle if not name, emperor.²⁶

It is not difficult to see how the United States demonstrates certain alarming parities. Already, political deadlock and failing bipartisan cooperation is creating strains that are attempting to be abated by means that would fracture American institutions. In the courts, fading view of nonpartisanship and competing political interests have given rise to a plan allowing the executive to add justices to suit their agendas.²⁷ In the legislature, lockstep partisanship, impatience, and the failure of compromise have produced plans to destroy to senate filibuster acting as a check on tenuous majority dominance.²⁸ Meanwhile, in the Executive, the shortcomings of the divided legislature have given rise to the unchecked executive order, used by recent presidents for everything from app bans to vaccine mandates.^{29;30} Tragically, in the meantime the populace, increasingly wary of institutional justice and desirous of action, has been wracked with violent protests regarding election outcomes and racial tension, all while calls ring out against the police force upholding stability^{31;32}. Much as in Rome, demagoguery in the executive is seeking to circumvent a bogged legislature as the greater body politic rends itself by faction. If the trend holds true, the strain on the rule of law is approaching critical mass.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

²⁷ "Biden's Supreme Court commission 'divided' on adding justices but warns of 'considerable' risk," *USA Today*, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/10/14/biden-commission-weighs-supreme-court-packing-draft-report/8444099002/>

²⁸ "The ant-filibuster effort is winning," *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/10/26/anti-filibuster-effort-is-winning/>

²⁹ "Biden revokes and replaces Trump executive orders that banned TikTok," *CNBC*, <https://www.cNBC.com/2021/06/09/biden-revokes-and-replaces-trump-executive-orders-that-banned-tiktok.html>

³⁰ "Biden announces sweeping vaccine mandates affecting millions of workers," *NBC News*, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/biden-announce-additional-vaccine-mandates-he-unveils-new-covid-strategy-n1278735>

³¹ "Jan. 6, 2021: How It Unfolded," *The Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/jan-6-2021-how-it-unfolded-11613047105>

³² "George Floyd Protests: A Timeline," *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd-protests-timeline.html>

Loss of Faith and Cultural Shift

The root of these political plights, however, in Rome and in America, is not inherently political, but cultural and religious. From its founding, there was never a doubt that Rome's republican tradition carried religious underpinnings. What later thinkers would name "civil religion," Roman thinkers as early as Marcus Terentius Varro in the second century B.C. called *civilis theologia*, "civil theology."³³ Though nominally referring to the rites, festivals, and sacrifices necessary to maintain the goodwill of the 'gods,' writers like Cicero saw these facets as inseparable from the virtues prerequisite to the maintenance of the republic.³⁴ In other words, the temperance of public officials and the abstention from abusing political institutions came from a perceived civic and underlying ethical code of Roman "*republican* religion."³⁵ As these virtues faltered, supplanted by vice and decadence, so too did the republic teeter, and once more Augustus, herald of the empire, destroyed the vestige of this pillar of virtue while proclaiming it secure.³⁶ Though he made grandiose displays of restoring republican tradition and piety, Augustus in fact co-opted and supplanted Roman republican tradition and civil religion with what became the Imperial cult, being revered in life and deified in death.³⁷ In this way, the people of Rome saw their political bodies corrupted and their institutions rendered inoperable because of a destructive cultural shift from the religion that underpinned their republic.

For the United States, political heirs to a republic itself the heir to protestant Christianity, the same dangers apply, and perhaps more. In the twilight of Rome's empire, Augustine of Hippo identified how even faithful the adherence to Roman civil religion, based upon paganism and the approval of the earthly elite, left room for the selfish seeking of glory over that of moral virtue. His answer, in turn, was that Christianity was not only truth, but provided the most stable and morally upright code upon which to base a worldly republic. The reason being that it looked first to glorify God in heaven, and only from that preeminence of faith and higher morality could justice and virtue, though imperfect, be found on earth.³⁸ Though America gained independence within an age of enlightened rationalism, in the words of Liberty University's Dr. Gai Ferdon, "America's heritage of liberty, republican institutions and unique political tradition of federalism, is fundamentally rooted in Europe's Protestant Reformation," as well as, in a more general sense, "reasoned biblical precepts and axioms which comprise a Biblical Christian view of man, God, and life."³⁹ Thus, for liberty *and* the rule of law to be maintained in the American republic, so too must the appreciation for the Christian tradition within America's constitutional framework and moral standard of the citizenry thereunder be maintained.

Here also, however, alarming tendencies are apparent. The destruction of American political institutions and the corruption of officials and the body politic at large have followed, as in Rome, a decline of culture away from the religious traditions that wrought them. Christian columnist Cal Thomas links the fading of Christian traditions with the loss of common national purpose, the decline of the family, and increasingly divided interests among the American

³³ Atkins, *Roman Political Thought*, 136.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 137-137.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Cal Thomas, *America's Expiration Date* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 47.

³⁷ Atkins, *Roman Political Thought*, 142-143.

³⁸ Thomas, *America's Expiration Date*, 88-89.

³⁹ Gai M. Ferdon, *A Republic If You Can Keep It: America's Authentic Liberty Confronts Contemporary Counterfeits* (Chesapeake, VA: Foundation For American Christian Education, 2008), 9,13.

public.⁴⁰ This is not, however, exclusive to the purview of Christian scholars, but has even been demonstrated among secular academics. Secular minds like Robert Bellah, Jackson Lears, and Christopher Lasch relate how “consumerism, individualism, emotivism, and therapeutic ethos...beset [American] culture today,” and how these have led to decline and dissatisfaction within America leading up to the present.⁴¹ America was built upon civil religion much as Rome was, and is built upon, as Augustine relates, the true faith from which an even greater republic on earth could rise than Rome⁴². Though not equating Christianity with Roman paganism on the grounds of truth, it is evident that the decline in Roman civil religion contributed greatly to the decline of contingent institutions, and that the same trend applies to the United States.

Verdict

This cultural and individual basis for political issues besetting both republics is not surprising. Indeed, the notion of republicanism itself allies naturally with liberalism, by which political institutions and ideals are crafted by individuals vested with liberty. Liberty, however, entails the power of the individual to direct the course of political events, and with great power comes great responsibility. Faith and morality, then, are the responsibility, the measure of restraint by which citizens can maintain the rule of law by acting for the good of the republic against their own selfish gains. Edmund Burke cast a similar tie between liberty and moral restraint, stating “Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites...Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without.”⁴³ Republicanism and liberty then, can only exist in such a framework in which citizens temper their own passions, for otherwise the rule of law breaks down amidst infighting and division, and it was Abraham Lincoln, quoting Jesus of Nazareth, who said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”⁴⁴ Indeed, such division would only end the republic, tending widely to anarchy or tyranny.

Remedy

One fortune bestowed upon America, however, cannot be understated: *It isn't Rome*. Thomas writes most notably, unlike any nation listed prior in his piece on the fall of empires: for America “there’s still time.”⁴⁵ America can still remedy its deficiencies and prolong its preeminence, not the least of which because it can learn from its predecessors. In order to do so, Thomas prescribes habits that begin with the individual and the family: setting standards of wisdom, decency, and morality pertaining to how one acts, what one views, and who one emulates. Likewise, one should scrutinize dogma, resist materialism, temper skepticism with hope, and take political responsibility as a citizen through reasoned analysis of policy and

⁴⁰ Thomas, *America's Expiration Date*, 154-162.

⁴¹ Bradley J.Gundlach et al, *Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian's Vocation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 156-157.

⁴² Atkins, *Roman Political Thought*, 142-143.

⁴³ “Edmund Burke, Letter to a Member of the National Assembly, 1791,” *Columbia University*, <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/%E2%80%9Cletter-member-national-assembly-edmund-burke-1791>

⁴⁴ “Lincoln's House Divided Speech,” *National Park Service: Lincoln Home*, <https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/housedivided.htm>

⁴⁵ Thomas, *America's Expiration Date*, 164.

candidates, among others.⁴⁶ Indeed, writer Eric Metaxas channels Benjamin Franklin in recalling how “only a virtuous people...are capable of freedom.”⁴⁷ In turn, Rome furnishes a prime example of the forfeiture of freedom following that of virtue. Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* recounts how the oppressed provinces and masses welcomed tyranny as a slight to the senatorial elite, choosing spite over virtue, and that the elite’s final failure to defend liberty came by their own abandonment of virtue for the vice of comfort.⁴⁸ Likewise, on healing division in the nation, Lynn Uzzell of the University of Virginia turns to Madison. Her prescriptions include the teaching of rhetoric and the understanding of both sides of political arguments, while socializing with political adversaries to never let political contentions become personal. With these and divestment of rampant, polarizing spirits that only detract from political discourse, she argues division can be tempered.⁴⁹ Such tempering would alleviate the corruption of political bodies, and thus strengthen the character and efficacy of government institutions.

Institutions, in turn, would more likely enact responsible decisions, taking the advice of Caldwell’s Cicero that, “The budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled.”⁵⁰ As Yural Levin of the American Enterprise Institute argues, flourishing institutions “make us more decent and responsible--habituating us in exactly the sort of virtues a free society requires.”⁵¹ These institutions, he continues, form a loop of influence with the character of the citizenry; when one thrives, the other follows, and when one falters, the other is dragged down alongside. The key to enacting more sweeping change, then, is to utilize integrity and strength of character not as a counterbalance in suspicion of institutions, but to allow these personal strengths to combine under the common ideals healthy institutions should embody. Americans must not be wary of institutions to the point of evading them, for a society with good character but poor structure would be as disastrous as it is impossible. Belief in the power of enacting reasonable change in a cooperative and civil manner through firm institutions would stem the tide of inefficacy and panic plaguing Americans over many contemporary issues.⁵²

Likewise, Levin identifies a crisis of legitimacy plaguing the nation’s elite. In a democratic system, he argues, the perceived non-egalitarianism creates tension in a democracy with anyone propelled to a ruling position. Levin’s remedy, then, is twofold: that the elites should provide “opportunities...for others to rise into the elite and by using their own power and privilege with restraint and for the greater good.”⁵³ History recounts that the dichotomy of Roman plebeians and patricians, and the duty of Roman senators, reflected these principles in the best days of the republic. Levin concludes with perhaps the second greatest fortune America yet possesses to evade destruction apart from time: “Americans are hungry for hope and renewal.”

⁴⁶ Ibid., 164-166.

⁴⁷ Eric Metaxas, *If You Can Keep It* (New York, NY: Viking, Random House, 2016), 55.

⁴⁸ “5 Reasons Why America Will Not Collapse Like the Roman Empire.” *Big Think*, February 12, 2017. <https://bigthink.com/the-present/5-reasons-why-america-will-not-fall-like-the-roman-empire/>

⁴⁹ “Madison’s Five Lessons for Overcoming Polarization,” *RealClear Public Affairs*, https://www.realclearpublicaffairs.com/articles/2021/03/18/madisons_five_lessons_for_overcoming_polarization_660476.html

⁵⁰ Taylor Caldwell, *A Pillar of Iron* (New York: Open Road Media, 1965), n.p.

⁵¹ Yural Levin, *A Time to Build: From Family and Community To Congress and the Campus, How Recommitting to our Institutions can Revive the American Dream* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2020), 163.

⁵² Ibid., 170-172.

⁵³ Ibid., 185.

Americans, even in the face of the prospect of the end, are eager to build and rebuild the nation once more into a brighter one, which he commends in stating, “Where we’re headed will be up to the builders and rebuilders.”⁵⁴ History and prudence have furnished the precepts requisite for the maintenance of republics, and if such precepts were adhered to, it is likely that America’s citizenry and government would flourish, the balance of liberty and the rule of law could be maintained, and any impending fall, unlike Rome’s, could be averted.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 199, 204.

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