

Just as a king first ruled over the American colonies, the government of ancient Rome was first a monarchy too. Rome later changed its government to a republic, much like the colonies formed a democratic government and became the new United States. However, after about 500 years, Rome changed again. This time it crowned an emperor for its growing territory. A republic is a political state or nation where power is held by the citizens or elected representatives. An empire is a state or nation that is ruled by one person, usually an emperor. The change from Roman Republic to Roman Empire was a turning point in history.

Rome's Republican Roots

The Roman Empire was one of the largest and most powerful empires the world has ever known. However, it did not start out that way.

Historians trace the roots of Roman civilization to the 700s BCE in what is now Italy. Rome was an important crossroads of traffic and trade. Originally a kingdom, Rome developed into a republic around 509 BCE. The term *republic* comes from the Latin *res publica*, which means “public affair.” Government was a public affair, with power in the hands of citizens.

Not all people in Rome had power, however. Most decisions were made by the patrician class. They were the wealthy landowners. Every year they elected two consuls, or leaders. The consuls were advised by the Senate, a group of patricians. The men of the lower class, known as plebeians, could vote. However, their votes did not count as much as the votes of the patricians. Slaves and women of all classes could not vote.

Though the Roman concept of citizenship and self-government may seem commonplace to modern people, the ideas were actually very new in ancient Rome. As early as 451 BCE, Romans wrote a legal code. This system of laws would evolve over the centuries of both the republic and the empire. Much like the legal system of the United States, rules were added, and legal decisions were also made on the basis of previous legal decisions.



Augustus Caesar is considered the first emperor of Rome.

As the republic grew, the people who were conquered by the Romans also became citizens. They were ruled by governors sent from Rome. With growth, however, central power of the republic began to break down. Military leaders conquered land and had armies that were loyal to them, not to Rome. Also, because of slave labor, patricians grew very wealthy. This caused unrest among the lower classes. Civil wars and revolutions began to wear away at the republic.

Becoming an Empire

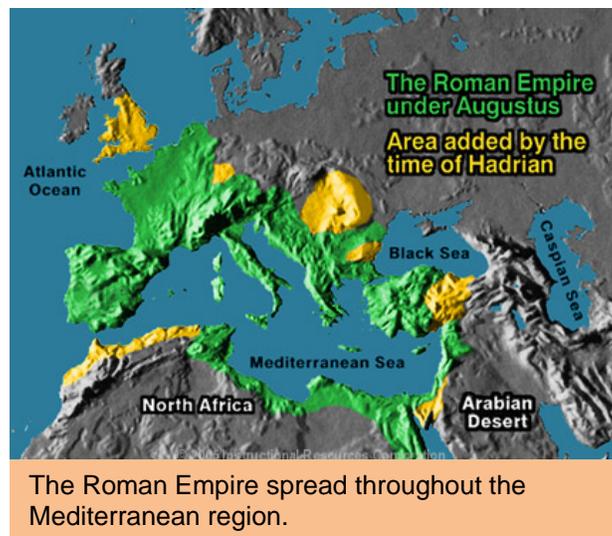
It is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment when the Roman Republic became the Roman Empire. The unrest in Rome and its territories had allowed Julius Caesar to take the powers of a dictator, or an all-powerful ruler. Dictatorship was allowed in the Roman Republic when there was a crisis, but only for six months. The Senate began to suspect that Julius Caesar was becoming too powerful and that his power might actually harm Rome. He was murdered by senators in 44 BCE.

Octavian, Mark Antony, and Marcus Lepidus ruled Rome together for a time. But after a series of political and civil wars, they split into different groups. Octavian defeated the last of these groups, led by Mark Antony. In 27 BCE, Octavian, who changed his name to Augustus Caesar, was crowned emperor.

When Augustus became emperor, he worked to add to his power and protect the empire. He kept the Senate as an advisory group, but in reality he had all the power. He sent leaders to rule for him in Roman provinces. He made all the military organizations into one national army under his control. After regaining central authority after decades of unrest, Augustus helped the empire become more stable.

The Empire at Its Height

The Roman Empire reached its height around 150 CE. The empire spanned most of Western Europe, all the way to what is now Spain in the southwest and Great Britain to the northwest. In the east, it extended to Syria and Judea in the Middle East. It also reached across the Mediterranean to North Africa. The *Pax Romana* (or Roman Peace) of the first and second centuries CE was



the longest period of peace the region had ever known. Peace and stability allowed trade to grow. The expansion of Rome and the growing population required new technology. This led to better roads and bridges. Aqueducts were invented to carry water to areas that lacked it. Sewage systems were created to deal with waste water. Centuries of stability allowed the legal system to develop in order to deal with the increasing complexity of Roman society.

Rome's prosperity also furthered the arts. New styles and techniques of painting, sculpture, and architecture emerged. Writers, poets, playwrights, and historians also contributed to the rich culture of the Roman Empire. While conquered people had to live under Roman rule, they also gained from Roman achievements. For some people, being conquered by Rome actually improved their standard of living. Rome also was able to keep such distant territories in part by allowing their cultural differences.

However, as the empire grew larger, it became difficult to maintain an army large enough to keep order and stop outside invasions. Emperors such as Caligula and Nero used their positions to gain personal power more than for the good of the empire. This stirred anger among the citizens. Many continue to debate exactly what caused the empire to fall and when. We do know that in 476 CE, a German general forced out the last Roman emperor in Western Europe, ending the Roman Empire.

The Lasting Impact of Rome

The impact of the Roman Empire has been felt around the world. Elements of the Roman Empire have lived on through the centuries. The code of Roman law and its structure of government have affected many nations, including the formation of the United States. The democratic principles of the Roman Empire became the basis of democratic governments that exist today.



The U.S. Capitol building

Latin, the language spoken in ancient Rome, is not commonly spoken today but it has influenced many other languages. The Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese languages all derive from Latin. Latin also had an impact on the development of the English language. Many English words, including *ad hoc*, *veto*, and *census*, come from Latin. The Roman Empire also helped the spread of Christianity, which became the official religion of the empire under Emperor Constantine. The Roman Catholic Church, of course, has its roots in Rome.

You can still see some of the roads, bridges, aqueducts, and public buildings built during ancient Rome across Europe and in parts of the Middle East. Though many of the original Roman buildings are now in ruins, the Roman style of architecture continues to be used in many modern buildings. In fact, the style of many U.S. government buildings – including the U.S. Capitol – draws on the design of those from ancient Rome. Just as some principles of modern democratic government come from Rome, so too does the architecture that houses them. From republic to empire, the effects of ancient Rome live on to this day.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** Who were the members of the ruling class of the Roman Republic?
 - A.** landowners
 - B.** plebeians
 - C.** patricians
 - D.** magistrates

- 2.** Which of the following was not a key part of the ancient Roman Empire?
 - A.** poetry
 - B.** environmentalism
 - C.** law
 - D.** architecture

- 3.** Why was Augustus Caesar's rule significant?
 - A.** He was the first Christian emperor.
 - B.** He was the first emperor of the Roman Empire.
 - C.** The empire began to decline during his rule.
 - D.** He was democratically elected to power.

- 4.** After the establishment of the Roman Empire, there was a long period of peace, stability, and prosperity. In what ways did the ideas and advancements during this time affect civilization throughout history? Provide evidence from the passage to support your answer.