



Freedom in Ancient Rome and the Modern World

Spring Quarter 2025 *** MW 9:30-11:20 AM ** Denny 112

NO PREREQUISITES

SATISFIES A&H/SSc, DIV REQUIREMENTS, AND COUNTS AS 'W' CLASS/5 CR.

Instructor: Dr. Joseph Bringman

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Spring Quarter Office Hours: Office hours for Spring Quarter will be by Zoom at the following time (and by appointment -- email me at bringj@uw.edu): (<mailto:bringj@uw.edu>):)

Thursdays, 3-4PM: <https://washington.zoom.us/j/92886238783> ↗ (<https://washington.zoom.us/j/92886238783>)

Course description: Freedom – *libertas*, in Latin – was a fundamental concept in ancient Rome, central throughout its history to, and in all aspects of, its political and social life. Indeed, the word *libertas* became literally synonymous with (that is, a name for) the 'Roman Republic'. This course examines 'freedom' in ancient Rome, from its founding in the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD, when Christianity became the dominant religion in the Roman Empire. Through selected readings in both primary and secondary sources, we will examine the various forms of

freedom important to Romans and how their views evolved (or remained the same) over time, specifically: personal freedom (including slavery), political freedom, religious freedom, and intellectual freedom (i.e., the freedom to write or say what one wants). In addition, however, we will also examine various perspectives on 'freedom' expressed in the modern world, including (but not limited to) the United States, and what they owe or do not owe to Roman concepts. Readings in Orlando Patterson's landmark book *Freedom*, an historical overview of the concept, will provide a benchmark for this, but will be supplemented by other readings as well.

Required texts and readings:

- Readings drawn from various primary sources (=ancient authors), including: Plato, Cicero, Livy, Horace, Seneca the Younger, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Epictetus, Appian, Marcus Aurelius, Cassius Dio, St. Augustine, etc.. (This list is provisional and subject to change and emendation!)
- Patterson, Orlando. *Volume 1: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*. Basic Books 1992. PLEASE note that this book is **NOT** currently available in electronic form. You **WILL** need a print copy of it. **If you plan to enroll in this class, you should obtain a copy BEFORE the quarter begins -- you will need it starting Day 1 of the quarter.**
- Rudd, N., trans./Powell, J., edit. (2009) *Cicero. The Republic and the Laws*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford University Press. An e-version of this book is available from the publisher and through other sellers.
- Additional readings in various secondary sources will be supplied or are readily available online through the UW Libraries (links will be provided on Canvas as needed)

Course requirements:

- (40%) successful completion of any 4 of 8 short, weekly 'response' papers. For 8 of the 10 weeks, you will be asked to write a 'response' to the week's readings; the requirement for each of your four papers is '2 pages or 1 hour, whichever comes first'. For each week I will post a guide to the week's readings, specifying various issues and questions to which I want you to give your attention, and which may help you think in a directed way about the readings; I will also post the specific writing assignments under 'Papers' in the Assignments section.
- (10%) Straightforward reading quizzes designed to help you master the most important points in our assigned readings
- (25%) 2 online midterms, each 12.5%. These will essentially serve to evaluate how well you are processing and retaining the information provided in the reading, and to some extent how effectively you are learning to think and write critically about the material. The midterms will be given online via Canvas in Weeks 5 and 9 respectively and will be available over a period of several days. You will be allowed to consult your texts and notes.
- (25%) In lieu of a standard final examination, you will write an 6-10 page paper, due no later than 6 PM (PT) on the date of the final exam. Throughout the quarter I will keep and post a list

of suggested topics, but you are encouraged to come up with your own ideas.

Learning Objectives. At the conclusion of this class, you will be able to:

- Think and write critically about fundamental perspectives on and ideas about 'freedom' in ancient Rome as expressed by a broad range of Greek and Roman writers and examined in variety of scholarly studies.
- Relate the Roman material to a broad selection of ideas and perspectives on 'freedom' in the modern world, including (but not limited to) the United States from its founding to the present day.
- Think and write critically about the role of 'freedom' in four essential areas: personal freedom (including slavery); political freedom; religious freedom; and intellectual freedom.
- Acquire the foundations for a historically and culturally informed appreciation of and sensitivity to a seminal concept in the development of Western and non-Western societies.

IMPORTANT UW POLICIES: PLEASE [CLICK HERE TO READ THESE IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES](https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1800348/pages/uw-policies-to-know) (<https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1800348/pages/uw-policies-to-know>) ABOUT RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS, THE STUDENT CONDUCT CODE, ACCESS AND ACCOMMODATIONS, and ACADEMIC INTEGRITY.

PLEASE NOTE that the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) content generators, such as ChatGPT, is NOT permitted for any of the writing required for this class (this includes *everything* -- weekly papers, quizzes, and the final essay).

A FEW CLASS GUIDELINES:

- In order for this class to be successful and meaningful *for you*, please a) make a concerted effort to keep up with and understand the readings, and b) come to class prepared to ask questions and contribute to discussions
- Laptop, cell phones, iPads etc.: It's OK to use these for class-related stuff -- but please don't use them for anything else.
- Coming late: I understand that it can sometimes be a challenge to get to class on time, but on those occasions when you have to enter the room late, please do so as unobtrusively as possible.
- Missing classes: I also understand that from time to time you may have to miss a class, but please don't ask me to recap a lecture or provide you with lecture notes. Ask someone in the class if you miss anything.

Tentative schedule of reading and materials to be covered:

NB: This is merely a rough outline of the principal topics to be covered. Each week I will post to

this page/space on Canvas a weekly assignment (I will post this well in advance) that will include the primary and secondary readings to be covered as well as identify a few specific issues to think about in connection with that reading. You will probably get the most out of each lecture if you have done the assigned week's reading prior to listening to the lecture.

Introduction (Week 1):

Detailed assignment for week 1 (<https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1800348/pages/week-1-march-31-april-4>)

Political freedom (Weeks 2-4):

Detailed assignment for week 2 (<https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1800348/pages/week-2-april-7-11>)

Detailed assignment for week 3 (<https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1800348/pages/week-3-april-14-18>)

Detailed assignment for week 4

Personal freedom (including slavery) (Weeks 5-7):

Detailed assignment for week 5

Detailed assignment for week 6

Detailed assignment for week 7

Intellectual freedom (Week 8):

Detailed assignment for week 8

Religious freedom (Week 9):

Detailed assignment for week 9

Retrospective reflection (Week 10):

Detailed assignment for week 10

Monday, June 7: **FINAL PAPER (<https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1800348/assignments/10190754>)**
due by 11:59 PM