

Chapter 10: Rome: From City-State to Empire: 10-7 Chapter Review
Book Title: World Civilizations
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10-7 Chapter Review

10-7a Summary

The peculiar balance of political power between aristocrats and commoners that the Roman republic established lasted as long as Rome remained a socially and ethnically homogeneous state and extended its rule only to Italy. This situation ended with Rome's hard-fought success in the Punic Wars of the third century B.C.E., when the city-state became in fact, but not yet in name, an empire.

The failure of the republic's pseudo-democratic political structure to adapt to the changed circumstances led to civil war and constant upheaval during the last century of its existence. Reformers attempted in vain to find a solution during these unstable years. Julius Caesar tried to establish a monarchy but was cut down by his conservative enemies. His adoptive son Octavian had better success as the first emperor, Augustus Caesar. For more than two hundred years, the Augustan reforms, continued by a series of able successors, enabled Rome to prosper in peace while creating a Mediterranean and west European hegemony.

Roman republican culture and artforms were originally based on Greek and Etruscan models, with the Greeks of the Hellenistic Age being particularly important.

In form and content, philosophy and religious belief resembled the Greek originals from which they were largely derived. More innovation was shown during the late republican and imperial epoch, but the creative artistic imagination was generally not the Romans' strong point. In law and government, and in the practical application of scientific knowledge to the everyday problems of society, however, few surpassed them.

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