



*The Founding: SS.7.CG.1.1*  
**Influence of the Roman Republic**  
**VIDEO SCRIPT**



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## **Influence of Ancient Rome**

1. Now that you've learned about the ideas of Ancient Greece and how they influenced the founders in the creation of our constitutional government, let's turn our attention to another ancient civilization, the Roman Republic.
2. After watching this video, you'll be able to
  - Explain the influence of Ancient Rome on America's constitutional republic (eg, civic participation, republicanism, representative government, rule of law, separation of powers)
3. In learning about Ancient Greece and its influence, you learned about their approach to democracy. Remember that in Athens, it was a direct democracy, where all citizens voted on every important issue and made decisions together for the polis. Remember too that the term 'democracy' is from 'demos' for people, and 'kratos' for power or strength. The Roman Republic, too, had a version of democracy, but it was a representative democracy, with **representative government**.
4. Of course, it took some time to get there. Ancient Rome was originally controlled by a tyrannical king known for abusing his power. He was overthrown around 509 BC/BCE and the Roman Republic was established. A republic is a form of government in which power is held by the people, who in turn elect representatives to make laws for them. Romans, like our founders, believed in republicanism. At the core of **republicanism** sits the idea of a **representative government** where people in an elected body make the decisions.
5. An important element of republicanism, and what makes it work, is the idea of **civic participation**. In the Roman Republic, citizens were expected to take part in government and civic life and fulfill their responsibilities and obligations. Just as with Athens, though, citizenship was limited. To be a citizen, you had to have two parents who were themselves free citizens of Rome and you had to be male. If you weren't a Roman, though, you could still become a citizen. You just had to do something like serve in the military! This is something the United States does too! Immigrants who serve honorably in the US military have an easier path to citizenship than other immigrants.
6. Unlike the United States today, Rome had different types and levels of citizenship. For example, some citizens had the political right to vote and hold office, while others had the rights of property and marriage but not voting or holding office. Unlike in Athens, women in the Roman Republic had property rights, marriage rights, and could own their own businesses, but they could never vote or hold office. They could sometimes take part in public debates and discussions though! Citizens could LOSE some of their rights if they did not fulfill their obligations and responsibilities to the Republic. For example, if you refused to serve on a jury, or serve in the military, you could be stripped of your right to vote.

Of course, this can happen to US citizens as well. In some states, felony convictions can lead to losing your right to vote!

7. Another important aspect of the Roman Republic that influenced our system of government is the rule of law. In the United States, we have our Constitution, which lays out our rights as citizens and how our government is supposed to work. The Roman Republic had something similar, though it was more of a law code than a constitution. This law code was made up of written laws and ancient traditions called the Twelve Tables. These Twelve Tables stated the rights and duties of each Roman citizen, whether they were patricians (the rich upper class) or plebians (the common people). It covered everything from property rights and trials to inheritance, family, and citizenship. The law code was posted in public where all Romans could see it. The Twelve Tables helped ensure society was based on **rule of law**, or the idea that the law would be applied fairly and publicly and no one would be above it.
8. Like the United States, the Roman Republic divided the power of the government into three groups: the Senate, the legislative assemblies, and the executive magistrates. However, the Romans decided that these three groups needed to be separate and distinct branches with the ability to check and balance, or limit the powers of the other branches. These ideas of **separation of powers** and checks and balances were crucial elements for preventing the rise of another tyrannical government, and the Framers embedded similar ideas in the U.S. Constitution.
9. The Senate was the highest body in the Roman Republic, and served as an advisory council to the executive branch of the Republic, the magistrates. Senators were appointed, and almost always were patricians, the wealthiest people in the Republic. The legislative assemblies of the Republic passed laws for the people, and were made up primarily of plebians, the common people of Rome. The magistrates, the executives of the Republic, were elected by the people of Rome, and were called consuls. Two were elected at a time, to share power and keep one from getting too powerful. There were also other types of elected magistrates, depending on the need. They even had a magistrate called a dictator, who was given absolute power to solve a particular issue he was elected to fix...and was then expected to give up his power afterward!
10. Despite the importance of representative government and republicanism, the Roman Republic transitioned into the Roman Empire, when the last dictator magistrate of the Republic, Julius Caesar marched his army into the city of Rome. He had abused his position and refused to give up his power. He was assassinated by members of the Senate who were trying to protect the Republic. His adopted son Octavian soon won a civil war and became the first emperor of the Roman Empire, Caesar Augustus.
11. This is an important lesson for us in the United States. We must ensure that we continue to value and treasure the ideals of our constitutional republic, including civic participation, the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the wisdom of our own United States Constitution to ensure that we do not follow the path of the Roman Republic into a loss of rights and representative government.
12. Be sure to watch the final video in this module to learn how Judeo-Christian ideas influenced our constitutional republic, and check out other modules to learn more about the Constitution, the rule of law, and separation of powers.