

Rome Before it Became Empire: A Pax Americana or a Republic If You Can Keep It?

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*“Fortune thus blinds the minds of men when she does not wish them to resist her power.”
— Livy*

It seems quite evident to many that the United States has been consumed by the same ambition and thus fate with that of the Roman Empire. That one of the most notorious periods in history for its extensive imperialism, corruption and barbaric slavery are the blueprint for what the founding fathers used in forming the moral constitution of the United States, and thus it has been rotten to its core from its very inception.

There is no doubt that the United States is acting in accordance with that of an empire presently.

However, from this alone, we cannot confirm whether it is in fact her founding constitution which is at fault or rather, *her abandonment of her constitution* which has led her to this monstrous outcome.

It is true that the founding fathers of the United States were very much influenced by Rome, but for those who have some knowledge on the history of that titan of an era, they would know that Roman history consists of three phases; that of the kingdom, the republic, and the empire. The period of empire was its most corrupt and malevolent, but what defined Rome’s characteristics before this? Was Rome actually something noble and honorable once? Which period were the founding fathers influenced and inspired by? Is the United States doomed to repeat the collapse of the Roman Empire? We will discuss all these questions here.

What Defined Rome before it Became an Empire?

Rome was founded in 753 BC as a kingdom, though much of the details around this partake in legend, it suffices for our purpose here that she was founded by Romulus who ruled until 717 BC. Numa Pompilius who would rule as king for the next 43 years, was a very wise king and founded the laws and governmental institutions that Rome would use for most of her existence. It should be noted that during this period, the kings were not chosen by bloodline but rather through a voting process by the senate, yes, there was already a senate formed during the period of kings.

Servius Tullius would become Rome’s 6th king and would rule 43 years until the day that his own daughter, whom he had marry to one of Tarquinius’ sons (Superbus), conspired

together to brutally murder Servius in his elder years in a terribly bloody public spectacle and usurp the throne. Servius' body would then be run over by his daughter by horse carriage causing an even further grisly scene, and the street would be known afterwards as *Vicus Sceleratus* (street of shame, infamy). Superbus would earn his nickname, meaning 'proud' or 'arrogant' due to his refusal to bury the body of Servius. And Servius would be known as the last of the benevolent kings.

Tarquinius Superbus would rule for 26 years and would be the last of the kings. He, not surprisingly, was very unpopular with the Roman people and senate, ruling as a cruel despot. This hatred for Superbus would find its snapping point when one of Superbus' sons, Sextus raped a nobleman's wife, named Lucretia. Lucretia was so humiliated and felt so dishonored by this act that once she had relayed the message to a group of four high-ranking men she stabbed herself in the heart with a dagger. Junius Brutus was one of the men present during this scene, and Livy writes that as soon as Lucretia had committed suicide, Brutus rushed over to her, plucked the dagger out of her breast and raised it, swearing the end of the Tarquin kingship.

Junius Brutus was able to quickly organise a gathering within the city where he exhorted the Roman people to rise up against the tyrant king. The people would support this and vote for the deposition of Superbus and the banishment of him and his entire family. Junius Brutus then gathered the people of Rome to swear an oath that they would suffer no man to rule Rome ever again, and as per Livy, the Roman people desirous of liberty would vow from that point on no longer to be swayed by the entreaties or bribes of kings.

A Republic is Born

If Superbus had been a just king, the crime against Lucretia would have been presented to him to act as judge over and he would not have been punished for the crime of his son, but this was not done. It was not done because it was known that Superbus *had no respect for a law benefitting the general welfare of the people but rather only knew his own personal law, and this is what the people could no longer suffer under.*

The largest change which transformed Rome from a kingdom into a republic would be the replacement of the king with two consuls, who would be voted in by the Roman citizenry and would only have a one year term. This was done to dissuade anyone from desiring to rule indefinitely and from abusing their powers for personal gain and thus was to protect against the corrupting lust for unbounded power seen during the age of kings from their sons.

Junius Brutus would be one of the first consuls of two, in replacing the king of Rome. During his term, Brutus had to act as judge over his sons who had committed treason and sentenced them to death, for which he witnessed their executions, something that was expected of the consul. This is not to say that Brutus was a cold man, but rather that he treated his sons with no additional favour, and judged their punishment for their crimes as he would have done for anyone else. It was because of this reputation for upholding honor that Brutus became a hero in Roman history; that he not only overthrew a tyrant king and helped establish the republic, but that he embodied the noble qualities it was to represent and that nobody was above the law for the general welfare of its people.

The Roman Republic would exist from 510 BC to 27 BC, however, before we go further I would like to point out a few parallels from another time.

His Majesty Hath Cast Them Off

On June 12, 1630, after a voyage of 76 days, four ships with 800 passengers, under the command of John Winthrop, anchored in Massachusetts Bay. With more ships on the way, he was soon to preside over nearly 20, 000 colonists by 1650.

Why were so many Europeans willing to take the risk of such a long voyage to a land that they knew hardly anything about and with no assured prospects? A major factor was that Europe had been experiencing almost ongoing warfare since the hundred years war and was presently experiencing the thirty years war, thus poverty, famine and pestilence ran rampant and the death rate was horrifying. There was no future for most people in Europe, which had descended into such chaos that its continued existence was really not certain.

It was recognised that one of the core reasons for Europe's descent into madness was the unreliability of its kings, being concerned more for their personal welfare than that of their people.

Faced with constant threats by King Charles I of England to remove the rights he had accorded the colonists under the Massachusetts Bay Charter to establish a town, Winthrop replied back that if such a thing were to occur, *"the common people here will conceive that his Majesty hath cast them off, and that hereby they are freed from their allegiance and subjection [to the Crown], and thereupon will be ready to confederate themselves under a new government."*

The New England Confederation would be established in 1643 and John Winthrop was elected its president. Its Articles of Confederation served as the first step toward realizing a new nation under constitutional rule. Historian Graham Lowry recounts in [How the Nation Was Won: America's Untold Story \(1630-1751\)](#) that Benjamin Franklin would later cite these articles to the French government during the American Revolution for their support.

The Massachusetts Bay colonists had made their stand against the British Monarchy and were ready to face the consequences, from this point on, they would be the shapers of their own destiny.

A Republic if You Can Keep It

For a little less than 300 years (5th to 2nd century BC), the Roman Republic had succeeded in upholding the oath that the people swore with Junius Brutus. And though it would be confronted with challenging times, additional heroes would follow after, such as Quinctius Cincinnatus, who became a legend not only in Roman but in American history as a representation of the ideal Roman virtue; as a man who had received absolute power in order to defend Rome at a time of crisis, and when his duty was complete and Rome was saved, returned the pre-existing political order and resumed a life as a citizen farmer.

Though Rome was in warfare for most of its existence, it should be noted that everyone was in warfare and to not be at war was not an option during these times. However, during this period, Rome treated for the most part its captured cities well and formed a sort of commonwealth to which their citizens, as Livy confirms, had pretty much equal rights to those in Rome, in fact they were called Roman citizens which was not a term taken lightly. Slavery also existed in Rome, however, slavery unfortunately was prevalent in every major

civilization of the time, including within Sparta, Athens, and Egypt. The point being that Rome, unlike its counterparts, did offer its citizenship to foreigners rather than death or slavery.

It was only by around the 2nd century BC that Rome started to develop core fundamental problems that would lead to extensive corruption and civil unrest. They would never fully recover from this and it would spell the end of the republic in 27 BC. One factor to this, were that militaries were led by their generals for longer periods of time as military campaigns became longer distances from Rome, and elite military groups started to form who held more allegiance to their General than to the Republic. This is what made the power of Caesar and the existence of the two triumvirates possible. In addition, slavery became much more prevalent, the treatment of their slaves much more barbaric, and thus the gladiator games became popular (which only started end of 3rd century BC). The gladiator games would be a terrible corruption on the people, and Spartacus would lead a successful rebellion for two years in response to this inhumanity in 73-71 BC.

Despite this fall from grace, many Roman heroes fought against this trend of corruption, such as Cato the Elder, Scipio Africanus, Cato the Younger and Cicero. Marcus Brutus thought it was in his destiny to return Rome to a republic when Caesar had seized it and crowned himself a king, just as his ancestor Junius Brutus did. However, Marcus did not learn from Junius' example. The death of Caesar did not return Rome to a republic but rather sealed its fate to be ruled again by the whim and folly of kings, and the age of empire was born.

The people of Rome had forgotten their liberty and thus foolishly forsook it. If they could have only foreseen the monstrous tyrants they would unleash on themselves, such as; Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero, they would have shuddered at the thought and done everything in their power to fight and return the republic to its original principles. Their folly would not only prove to be the doom of Rome but that of much of the world for centuries after.

Ben Franklin would state at the close of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 in response to a question as to what form of government had been formed, "A Republic, if you can keep it." Franklin was entirely aware of the failure of Rome as a republic and it was never meant to be a literal model for the American Republic. However, that said the upholding of any republic would ultimately be subject to the moral condition of that society. The right of sovereignty meant the responsibility to uphold its integrity, the people would no longer have a king to blame but themselves if they were to squander this freedom.

Fortune favours the....

So what are we to take from all of this? Though Roman history is much too large to cover within this one paper, if you read either Livy or Machiavelli's review of this history, it is undeniable that the Roman Republic did originate from an honorable and noble view of mankind, its execution was left wanting at times but it strove for most of its earlier existence for these ideals.

In addition, the Roman influences that inspired the founding fathers of the American Republic were based on these very evident principles to uphold liberty above all else. The Americans wished nothing more than to be free of the subjugation of monarchical rule and

were willing to go to war with the most powerful empire in the world to win their liberty from it.

Though slavery was a mark that the United States had to battle with, it is important to acknowledge that this did not originate from within its self-conceptualisation but rather was a mark that was carried forth from Europe. A whole book could be written debating whether the founding fathers truly meant **all men** were born equal and free, suffice to say that when it came to a head during Lincoln's time and a civil war erupted, there was a stand for the liberty of all.

For those who are uncertain whether the origin of the U.S. is indeed a noble and good one, I would bring forward that the Russians deemed it so. It would be stated by Czar Alexander II that if Britain and France would have intervened in America's civil war for the side of the Confederates, that Russia would have considered this a *casus belli* and was willing to go to war with Britain and France over the matter. For the reason why, refer to my [paper](#) on this. It is thus undeniable that Russia deemed the continued existence of an intact United States rather important.

Though the U.S. would be in an internal conflict with itself as to which identity it would ultimately choose, it is important to recognise that there were indeed many engaged on the side for the emancipation of all people and access to a decent standard of living. Frederick Douglass, born a slave but amongst the most free as a man, understood that the preservation of the country during the civil war needed to occur before and not after equal rights and became opposed to the Abolitionists over this matter. He saw what the power of the machine tool industry in Massachusetts could accomplish in comparison to the brute slave labour of the south and understood that slavery would not be able to compete with the North's offer and economic boom.

Lincoln had succeeded in preserving the country, however, he would not be allowed to continue into a second term and was assassinated in 1865. This was followed by a number of additional assassinations of American presidents: Garfield in 1881, McKinley in 1901, and Harding in 1923 (from a very suspect food poisoning). FDR would pass away in office in 1945, and after a questionable decision to replace his former VP Henry Wallace with cardboard cut-out Truman, [the United States was set on a course that caused her to abandon what she had first set out to accomplish](#).

By 1961, President Eisenhower would warn of a lagoon creature that had been created in the post WWII world, the military industrial complex, as something that had gotten out of control and would threaten the liberty of Americans and the world. That the United States, who had before then a citizens army, had now elite full-time military units that were only growing in size, who only knew the life of a soldier opposed to a constant enemy.

The United States would suffer [one more assassination of a president in 1963](#), and now here we find ourselves today, in perpetual war.

Is it too late to turn around?

Machiavelli said, that if a system is corrupt it depends on two things as to whether it will be doomed to collapse or not, firstly whether it was always corrupt or had become corrupted and secondly if the people were past a point of salvation. If the system was good at its origins, and the people had some imprint of that remaining, there would be hope that that

system could still turn itself around. And therefore I say, there is still a chance. A chance not just for the continual existence of the U.S. as something good but that the rest of the world need not risk getting pulled down along with it in the case of a collapse.

There is a stirring amongst a number of people within the United States, they have had enough with war. There is growing disdain for the present corrupt structures of their system and a growing support for those who wish to enforce peace. Tulsi Gabbard is an inspiring response to this corrupt age, and she has been succeeding despite the sabotage and attacks she has undergone from mainstream media and her very own political party.

The predictable rise and fall of empires is not based off of a cyclical formula that we are condemned to repeat for the rest of our existence. We do have the capability, if we have the will, to break out of this shrinking room and enter a new paradigm, namely, the Eurasian Economic Union and the New Silk Road.

"For where men have but little wisdom and valor, Fortune more signally displays her power; and as she is variable, so the states and republics under her influence also fluctuate, and will continue to fluctuate until some ruler shall arise who is so great an admirer of antiquity as to be able to govern such states within a republic so that Fortune may not have occasion, with every revolution of the sun, to display her influence and power." — Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy

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