

Slide 9 Handout: Before we can discuss Roman attitudes towards dark skin, ‘Roman-ness’, and non-Romans, we must first talk about Roman citizenship...

Though being ‘Greek’ did not require citizenship, being ‘Roman’ **did** (Rome was originally a city-state, after all). Yet ‘Roman citizenship’ was itself a constantly shifting construct...

I. Useful information about Roman citizenship:

A. Roman citizens (*cives Romani*) in the Roman republic:

1. The Roman republic was born ca. 509 BCE after the Romans expelled their Etruscan rulers. In this republic (the city-state of Rome), only Roman aristocrats (*patricians*) were citizens. *Patrician* men could vote, serve in government, own property, negotiate contracts, marry legally (so inheritance ‘counted’), & expect the law’s full protection. They also had to pay taxes & serve in the military. *Patrician* women were also citizens but had the status of perpetual minors (so required adult male guardianship, though Roman law did offer limited legal avenues for a citizen woman’s emancipation, i.e., legal self-sufficiency).
2. *Patricians* abused their political/legal advantages, however, & exploited Roman commoners (*plebeians*). Thus, ca. 494 BCE the *plebeians* ‘seceded’ from Rome: sitting outside the city walls they refused to work or serve in the military so *patricians* could enrich themselves. This won *plebeians* the right to form a council & elect *plebeian* tribunes to represent their interests in government (i.e., a limited form of ‘citizenship’). It also initiated the ‘Conflict of the Orders’ (the *plebeian* order’s struggle with the *patrician* order for political/legal equality). After securing more & more rights over time, *plebeians* achieved full equality in 287 BCE.
3. If a Roman *manumitted* (freed) an enslaved person, that ‘freedman/freedwoman’ (*libertus/liberta*) automatically gained Roman citizenship (with some restrictions). If he/she was married to a free Roman, children born after *manumission* were citizens, too (with *no* restrictions). *Manumission* was not uncommon, and since many enslaved people were foreign it contributed to the growing diversity of Rome’s citizenry. (**Note:** a freed-person’s status was precarious. Continuing freedom required continuing ‘service’ (of any kind) to one’s former owner, who could legally revoke an (allegedly) ‘ungrateful’ freed-person’s freedom).

B. ‘Latin rights’ (*ius Latii*), Roman allies (*socii*) and the expansion of Roman citizenship beyond the city-state of Rome:

1. Around 496 BCE, after conquering nearby Latium’s Latin-speaking tribes, the Romans granted these ‘Latins’ *Latin rights*: Latins kept full rights in their own states. As for their new Roman ‘rights’ they could do business & negotiate contracts with Romans (as equals), marry Romans, & be granted Roman citizenship. But they could not vote, lacked full legal protection, had to serve in Rome’s army, & had to pay Rome tribute.
2. As Rome expanded into Italy, newly conquered Italian states were granted *Latin rights*, while states that had willingly signed alliance-treaties with Rome were granted the status of ‘allies’ (*socii*). ‘Allies’ had *Latin rights*, including required military service, but did *not* have to pay tribute. After 200 BCE, *socii* and those with *Latin rights* could be awarded Roman citizenship for displays of loyalty. *Latin rights* were also granted to: a) Roman citizens leaving the city of Rome to found/live in Roman colonies; and b) some conquered foreign territories (whose elite were given full Roman citizenship to keep them aligned with Roman interests).
3. Around 150 BCE, magistrates (elected officials) of Italian towns/states were granted Roman citizenship. Further, anyone with *Latin rights* who settled in the city of Rome gained Roman citizenship.

4. By 100 BCE, Italian states had fought for Rome in three Punic wars and now made up 2/3 of the Roman army. The *socii* (allies) sought Roman citizenship but were denied, prompting some to secede from Roman control & igniting the ‘Social Wars’ (= ‘Ally Wars’), ca. 91-88 BCE. As a result, ca. 90 BCE, Rome offered Roman citizenship to *any* Italian states that had not rebelled and any states that immediately ceased hostilities.

C. Roman ‘mythology’ & Roman citizenship

1. Rome’s unusually ‘inclusive’ attitude towards non-Romans is reflected in (and/or influenced by?) its mythic history. Rome’s epic ancestor was Aeneas, an Asian refugee/Trojan prince who fled Troy’s fall. His descendant Romulus welcomed fugitives, criminals, & those fleeing slavery into his new city of Rome as its first citizens. Additionally, to find wives for this largely male population, Romulus kidnapped women from the nearby Sabine tribe. “Such stories [of] Roman origin... situated the boundaries of Rome, and Roman identity itself, as strikingly porous to outsiders from the very beginning” (McCoskey 2012: 69).

II. Citizenship & legal inclusion in the Roman Empire

A. Ultimately, “a range of status levels...could be granted” to those the Romans conquered: “full citizen, citizen *sine suffragio* (without the vote), ‘Latin’, and ally...[A]s such precise demarcation of civic status suggests, Roman citizenship played an integral role in the Roman incorporation of other groups.” A ‘Roman’ no longer shared ethnicity, nation, or language but “a common citizenship” (McCoskey 2012: 70). Any one of the status levels above (whether it granted partial or full citizenship status/rights) made you ‘Roman under the law.’ (Non-citizens (*peregrini*, ‘foreigners’) used local laws and had no rights or protection under Roman law).

1. Thus, when Marcus Velleius Paterculus summarizes Roman history from 390-100 BCE, he identifies citizenship (& its extension) as a *legal* status (*Compendium of Roman History* 1.14.1, ca. 19 BCE – 31 CE):

Huic rei per idem tempus civitates propagatas
auctumque Romanum nomen. communione iuris
haud intempestive subtexturi videmur.

At the same time, in respect to this [*summarizing the history of Roman colonies*], we by no means seem out of place to weave in the extensions of citizenship & the expansion of the Roman name by the sharing of the law/legal rights (*ius*).
(Translation by Leah Himmelhoch)

2. The Roman empire was indisputably diverse. Yet also, when it came to Roman *citizenship*: as the Empire kept expanding, so did grants of Roman citizenship & Latin/Ally rights to foreign individuals & territories. Then, in 212 CE the Roman Emperor Caracalla made all free people (men & women) within the Empire ‘Roman citizens’ (via the *Constitutio Antoniniana*). Some scholars argue that Caracalla’s edict was due to (or led to) citizenship’s decreasing ‘value,’ but others argue that citizenship was always a valuable right. What do you think?

Rome’s empire was diverse, but to be ‘Roman’ required Roman citizenship. And as Rome kept offering different citizenship levels to those it subdued, ‘Roman’ diversity expanded, too!

Note: we should not mistake ‘sharing citizenship’ for ‘tolerance.’ Romans were incredibly ethnocentric and, initially, only expanded citizenship status to end or avoid bloodshed. But Romans were also practical: they realized that sharing citizenship helped to stabilize their growing empire; they did accept ‘Romanized’ foreigners — even as they also remained willing to harm any group they deemed threatening, or to exploit any nation for its wealth.