

Study Questions:
Tacitus 2

Hum 110, Reed College
Prof. Laura Leibman

1. Republic v. Caesars

"The Latin term *res publica* (from which the word "republic") is usually translated as 'state' or 'commonwealth.' At no time was Rome a democracy (that is rule by the people) in the Greek, or true, sense. Its society was rigidly divided by legal status (free or enslaved) and class....The republic began, and finished, as a state largely dominated by the two upper classes, the senators, who qualified by birth and wealth, and the equestrians or knights, those in the second of five categories to which people were allotted according to their means....The constitutional change from monarchy to republic was gradual. The main functions of the king, including full military command, were undertaken by two consuls with equal powers, elected for one year only....according to Varro, 'the consul was so named because he "consults" the people and the senate' (Antony Kamm, *The Romans*. London: Routledge, 1995: 13).

Main Power Positions Under the Republic:

1. *Consuls*: Two Chief officers elected for one year only.
2. *Praetors*: Chief law officer and judge, and understudy to the consuls, particularly in the administration of the provinces.
3. *Quaestors*: assistant to the consuls, particularly as a controller of the military or civic treasury, and keeper of record.
4. *Senate*: About 300 members. Nominations by birth or rank. Did not pass laws so much as refer its advice to the popular assemblies. Complete control over finance, administration of the state and its empire, and relations with foreign powers. Adjudicated on religious matters and acted as an intermediary between the Roman people and the gods. (Kamm 13-16)

What were Republican virtues? What were Imperial Virtues?
Does Tacitus view the Republic with Nostalgia?

2. What is Tacitus' View of History?

3. What are the Emperors' sins? What are their Virtues? How can you be a noble person under an Emperor?

4. How does Tacitus deal with class? How does he respond to people crossing class boundaries?

5. How does Tacitus portray women? How does he respond to women who cross gender boundaries? What is the result for the state? How does he respond to men who cross gender boundaries? How does he define masculinity?

6. What is the moral, political, and social effect of committing suicide? How does this compare to the way suicide is received today?

7. When are motives more important than actions?

8. Tacitus' views on Violence.

Historian Richard Slotkin postulates that violence has been central to American culture because it is associated with regeneration. According to Slotkin, "The first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation; but the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience" (Slotkin *Regeneration Through Violence* 5).

Does this view of violence apply to any works we have read? Does it apply to Tacitus?