



## **Section 2: Building a Republic**

Before it was an empire, Rome was a city ruled by a king. Americans followed in Rome's footsteps over two thousand years later when they overthrew a British king and founded a republic of their own. Americans often invoked the memory of the heroes and legends of ancient Rome. In this way, the ideals and virtues of republican Rome became a part of the foundation of America.

In this section, visitors can compare and contrast founding myths of ancient Rome and America, including the tales of Romulus and Remus and Paul Revere's midnight ride. Guests will also discover the connections between Cincinnatus, the great Roman general, and George Washington, who has been called the "American Cincinnatus." A bust of George Washington depicts America's first commander-in-chief with a Roman toga draped loosely over his clothing.

Through a collection of books, manuscripts, and law tablets, visitors will see how the Founders studied the Roman republic when writing their own federal constitution. In declaring their independence from King George III, Americans captured the spirit of the ancient Romans who revolted against their king to found a republic. A rare broadside of the Declaration of Independence is on display.

Slavery is also explored in this section. Both ancient Rome and America before 1865 were slave societies. Slave collars from ancient Rome and the United States will be on display in the exhibition. Visitors can also view John Quincy Adams Ward's *The Freedman*, a bronze sculpture created in response to Abraham Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. The abolitionist piece, done in a classical style, depicts an African American with broken chains on the cusp between slavery and freedom.

The section concludes with an exploration of executive power. Ancient Romans and modern Americans have struggled with the problem of lodging executive power in one person. In the first century BCE (88 – 31 BCE), a crisis of Senate authority in Rome led to civil war and the rise of authoritarian rule. Strong political and military leadership under Julius Caesar and then Octavian (the future Emperor Augustus) brought an end to the Roman Republic. Aware of the fate of Rome, America's founders worried about the power of the new office of the president. They often looked to Roman history for examples of leaders who were too strong or too weak. Busts of Julius Caesar and Augustus are on display in this section.

## **Section 3: A Classical Revival**

During the early years of America's republic, classical art, architecture, and culture made ancient Rome part of Americans' daily lives. The style called "Neoclassicism" reached a peak of popularity in the late 1700s and early 1800s. But even today, Americans continue to look toward Rome for artistic inspiration.

In the mid-1700s, Europeans began excavating the long-buried Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, sparking a renewed fascination with the classical world. Americans traveling to Italy on the Grand Tour visited these sites and brought this classical influence back to America. Visitors can view the cast of a man who did not escape the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, along with other excavated remnants of this lost world.

This section also highlights the parallels between American aspirations for virtuous citizenship and the stories of heroic Roman men and women. In both their personal and public lives, early Americans often modeled their manners and morals after their vision of the patricians and matrons of ancient Rome. This admiration is reflected in several artifacts, including letters exchanged between John and Abigail Adams, in which Abigail

signs her name “Portia” after the wife of the Roman Senator Brutus; a portrait of Sarah Middleton, wife of Constitution signer Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, shown in antique-style dress and posed like the classical prophetess Sibyl; and a bust of Benjamin Franklin in Roman garb.

The Roman influence also extended to the home, architecture, city planning, and entertainment. Americans built private homes in Roman architectural styles and filled them with furniture, statues, and other design elements that made them think of ancient Rome. A collection of Roman and American jewelry, decorative household items, clothing, and furniture on display reflects the similarity in style.

In addition, a sketch of the Washington, D.C. Capitol dome and a model of the Capitulum of Brescia show the incorporation of Roman architecture into American government buildings.

Modern Americans continue to follow Roman models for entertainment. Whether in a sports arena or a movie theater, ancient Rome continues to inspire, amaze, and entertain Americans. Visitors can compare the spectacles that took place in the Roman Colosseum with one of the most popular American sports – football! Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver Harold Carmichael’s helmet is on display with a gladiator helmet and four original pieces from the gladiator barracks in Pompeii – a “greave” (shin guard), two spearheads, and a dagger. Additionally, a collection of movie posters, for films including *Gladiator* and *Ben-Hur*, showcases the lasting influence of ancient Roman stories on American entertainment.

#### **Section 4: Expansion and Empire**

At its height, the Roman Empire was the largest in the ancient world, stretching from Western Europe to the Near East. The Romans acquired their vast territory over the course of centuries as both a republic and an empire. In contrast, the United States expanded rapidly across North America in one century – the 1800s. As its influence has grown, America has frequently looked to ancient Rome to judge the benefits and costs of empire-building.

Busts of several influential Roman emperors are on display, including those of Trajan, Nero, and Commodus. This section also explores the expansion of territory in ancient Rome and America, through military action, the building of infrastructure, and commerce and trade. Artifacts include a collection of Roman and American coins, military helmets and weapons from ancient Rome, Indian Peace Medals of Andrew Jackson and Ulysses S. Grant, a piece of the Central Pacific Rail from the Transcontinental Railroad, and a model of an aqueduct.

With expansion came a surge in diversity in both ancient Rome and America. Imperial Rome became increasingly diverse as more people were brought into the Empire. In contrast to ancient Rome, much of America’s diversity has come from the millions of people who have immigrated to its shores. The influx of foreign peoples also led to an expansion of citizenship over time.

Citizenship in ancient Rome was a prized possession. Serving in the military was one of the main ways for non-citizens from Rome’s provinces to receive citizenship. Visitors will have the chance to view rare, bronze tablets granting Roman citizenship to an auxiliary soldier named Infante Veneto. The tablets reveal that he received his citizenship from Emperor Domitian on July 13, 93 CE.

Similarly, a July 1862 act of Congress allowed aliens who were honorably discharged from the Union Army to petition for citizenship after only one year of residency in the United States. On November 2, 1864, Thomas Lomax, an immigrant from England who had spent 10 months serving in the Pennsylvania 124<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment during the Civil War, went before the United States Eastern District Court in Pennsylvania to become a naturalized American citizen. Lomax's naturalization papers are on display in this section.

### **Section 5: Enduring Legacy**

The Roman Republic and its empire in Europe and the Mediterranean lasted for almost 1,000 years. Though its power eventually waned, the legacy of ancient Rome, like the objects it left behind, still remains.

At its founding, Americans modeled their new nation on everything they admired about ancient Rome. Today, fascinated by its imperial grandeur and excess, Americans see Rome as both a model of their aspirations and a portent of what they fear their country may become.

Visitors to the exhibition will be left to ponder what ancient Rome foretells about the fate of America during a special video presentation featuring curatorial consultants Dr. Caroline Winterer, Associate Professor of History at Stanford University, and Dr. Campbell Grey, Assistant Professor of Classical Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

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### ***Ancient Rome & America***

February 19 through August 1, 2010  
National Constitution Center in Philadelphia

Admission to *Ancient Rome & America* is \$20 for adults, \$18 for seniors ages 65 and up, and \$12 for children ages 4-12. Active military personnel and children ages 3 and under are free. Group rates are also available. Admission to the Center's main exhibition, *The Story of We the People*, including the award-winning theater production "Freedom Rising," is included. iPod audio tours cost an additional \$5. For ticket information, call 215.409.6700 or visit [www.constitutioncenter.org](http://www.constitutioncenter.org).

The exhibition was created in partnership with Contemporanea Progetti of Florence, Italy, in collaboration with the Ministero per i Beni e Le Attività Culturali, Rome, Italy.

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