

CHAPTER  
**1**  
SECTION 2

**Section Summary**  
**THE ROMAN REPUBLIC AND EMPIRE**

In 509 B.C., after driving out the Etruscans, the Romans set up a new government called a **republic**. The Romans thought a republic would keep any individual from gaining too much power. The 300 members of the republic’s senate were all patricians—the landholding upper class. Senators, who served for life, made the laws.

Each year, the senators elected two **consuls** from among the patricians. The consuls supervised the business of government and commanded Rome’s armies. In the event of war, the senate might choose a **dictator** to temporarily take complete control over the government. The common people, or plebeians, made up the bulk of the Roman population. In time, the plebeians influenced government to have the laws written down in the Twelve Tables. They also gained the right to elect their own officials, called **tribunes**. The tribunes could **veto** laws passed by the senate that were harmful to plebeians.

As Rome’s political system evolved, its armies expanded Roman power into the eastern Mediterranean. On the north coast of Africa, the Romans also destroyed the city-state of **Carthage** and established themselves as masters of the western Mediterranean. Expansion, however, created problems. At issue was who should hold power—the senate or popular political leaders looking to enact reforms. Soon Rome was plunged into civil war.

One military commander, **Julius Caesar**, emerged from the chaos and seized control. Although Caesar kept the senate and other features of the republic, he forced the senate to make him dictator. Jealous and fearful of his power, Caesar’s enemies stabbed him to death. Caesar’s grand-nephew Octavian became the new ruler. The senate gave Octavian the title **Augustus Caesar**, and he became the first emperor.

During the time known as the *Pax Romana*, the Roman empire brought peace, order, unity, and prosperity to the lands it ruled. Trade flowed freely to and from distant lands in Africa and Asia. Merchants carried ivory, gold, spices, silk, and other commodities. People spread ideas as they traveled. The greatest legacy of Rome, however, was the establishment of justice through the law. In the 400s, the emperor **Justinian**, in what was now the eastern Byzantine empire, reformed the Roman law code. Later, this code influenced the Christian church and medieval monarchs.

**Review Questions**

1. Why did the Romans set up a republic?

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2. How did Roman expansion in the Mediterranean affect Rome?

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**READING CHECK**

Which Roman ruler forced the senate to name him dictator?

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**VOCABULARY STRATEGY**

What does *commodities* mean in the underlined sentence? What clues to its meaning can you find in the nearby words? Circle the words in the sentence that could help you learn what *commodities* means.

**READING SKILL**

**Understand Effects** Identify two effects of Roman rule under the empire.

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