

## Spring History & Heritage -- #3 (April 7)

### **Late Imperial Rome (200s AD) --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 125-136)**

**This ancient society**, in the era after the “Five Good Emperors,” was fraught with despotism, endless wars for the throne, and a populace sinking into moral degradation? One of the tyrants when he lay dying, Septimius Severus, advised his successors (his violent sons) to “Be of one mind” and “Enrich the soldiers; nothing else matters.” Many emperors lived and died by the sword, their demise sometimes at the hands of their own warriors, though Diocletian (r. 284--305 AD) proved an exception to the ghastly rule.

### **Centralized Universalism --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 125-136)**

**This political characteristic**, one of the causes of the fall of imperial Rome, calls less for unity than for stifling uniformity among diverse regions? The antithesis of the “particularism” of the old Greek city-states with their local concerns and fierce independence, the late Roman imperium (200s--300s AD) insisted on central command and control at the expense of the autonomy of non-Roman cultures. The upper classes abroad may have been Romanized, but the outlying provinces lost their distinctiveness.

### **Diocletian --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 125-136)**

**This Roman Emperor (r. 284--305 AD)** is remembered mostly for declaring himself a god worthy of worship and persecuting non-conformist Christians late in his reign? His “harsh policies,” writes Russell Kirk, were driven by “harsher necessity,” calling for a vast army, a four-fold administrative division of the empire, and a total concentration of power in himself and three colleagues. Hostile barbarians without, not to mention degraded and demanding inhabitants within, exhausted the emperor’s energies.

### **Class Warfare --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 125-136)**

**This social-economic tension**, ubiquitous in the late Roman Empire (200s--300s AD), may be cited as a cause of Rome’s downfall? No group and no interest was spared from suspicion—native-born Romans v. freedmen; urban masses v. senatorial and equestrian families; rural folk v. city dwellers; citizens v. slaves; soldiers & tax collectors v. everybody. It was as if all kinds of men, forced to render everything to Caesar, lost their natural identities, their fraternal spirit, even their sympathy for one another.

### **“A Dead World” --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 125-136)**

**This striking phrase**, writes Russell Kirk, is an apt description of the spiritual condition of imperial Rome on the verge of being toppled by barbarians (200s--300s AD)? The old pagan piety—centered in moral, social, and ceremonial duties—commanded no longer the loyalty of the masses, and no suitable replacement arrived in time to save state and society. Till Christianity came along, in fact, neither emperor-worship, nor stoicism, nor oriental mystery cults were of much help.

**(sources for the Q&A’s are indicated; any errors of judgment are those of Veritas history teacher Mr. Zaffini, author of this post for his students and their families)**