Course Learning Outcomes for Unit III

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Analyze how early and contemporary Western cultures define Western Civilization.
   1.1 Recall events that early Western cultures used to define Western Civilization.

2. Analyze the political, cultural, and social contexts out of which the West developed.
   2.1 Recall political, cultural, and social contexts that shaped the West.

3. Evaluate the causes and effects of major historical events, including the influence of key individuals, institutions, and ideologies.
   3.1 Recall key individuals and their influence on major historical events.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 4:
Life in the Hellenistic World, 336-30 B.C.E.

Chapter 5:
The Rise of Rome, ca. 1000-27 B.C.E.

Unit Lesson

The Mediterranean Region

Unit III examines two great military forces of the ancient Mediterranean world: Alexander the Great and the Roman Republic. In the Mediterranean region of this age, Rome commanded the armies, but Greece ruled the minds. This unit will also explore the cultural, political, and religious lives within these two powers and how each nation coped with the limits of power.

Before Rome came to prominence, it was Greece that still clung to its empire in the fourth century BC. As if in a tragic play of its own that Greek writers would pioneer, Sparta and Athens saw all their amassed power and influence vanish with the Peloponnesian War.

In the North did rise Macedonia. Here, Phillip II, King from 359 BC to 336 BC, erected a new army, determined to forge an empire. Though nearly as drunk on his own ale as with his own power, he crushed his enemies in southern Greece and founded the Corinthian League to force the city-states to unite in support of Philip's political power across the region. What remained of an individual polis in the League was allowed to manage most local activities, but Macedonia would speak for Greece in military and foreign affairs. Philip's dreams were ended with an assassin's blade in 336 BC.

Alexander, Philip's twenty-year-old son and heir, assumed the throne. The unlikely king set out to conquer the world he saw before him. Leading a force of 37,000 troops, Alexander marched into Asia Minor in 334 BC, focused on his own dreams of bringing the Persian Empire to its knees and conquering whatever lay beyond.

Alexander was a man of great intellect. He studied the arts and sciences as much as tactics and diplomacy. He brought scientists, engineers, and scholars to study his new empire as they traveled and to spread Greek ideas about the world.

Few initially expected Alexander to pose a threat to anyone, least of all the Persians. By 332 BC, he had ripped away their control of Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Asia Minor. The western third of their empire was in Alexander's hands, and he wanted more. Along the way, he founded the city of Alexandria, a great port city in Egypt, and center of academics in the centuries to come.

By the next year, the desperate King of Persia, Darius III, realized he could not stop Alexander. He begged to salvage his empire, offering half to the Greeks if they ceased their offensives. Alexander rejected the offer, and within months, the capital of Persia, Persis, was Alexander's.

Darius fled Alexander's armies, but his own men, tired of years of humiliating defeats and retreats, killed him in 330 BC.

Alexander pressed forward, taking what is now Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. By 327 BC, the distant and exotic land of India lay at his feet. Though he wanted to push to the ends of the Earth for conquest, his exhausted troops could go no further. Exhausted but triumphant, they turned west. In 323 BC, Alexander was in Babylon, designing a new offensive against the West, but his own injuries and ill health could bear no more, and he died at the age of 33, leaving the largest empire in history to that time.

"To the strongest," weakly muttered Alexander on his deathbed. He left no heir and never made his successor known. Instead of fighting among themselves for such a mighty empire, his generals split it four ways.

The Hellenistic kingdoms: (Hellenistic means "to imitate Greeks.") These kingdoms emerged and included such states as the Seleucid Kingdom stretching from the Mediterranean to India, the Attalid Dynasty of Pergamum in Asia Minor, the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt, and the Antigonid kings ruling Macedonia itself. The kingdoms faltered over the next two centuries, mostly falling to the Romans as they moved eastward. Greeks lived, traded, and traveled throughout these lands, leaving behind their arts, trades, and ideas for future generations.

From the tribes of Latium in central Italy, one great nation arose, emanating from one central city, Rome. The Latins were loosely associated, with communities largely independent. From their founding, apparently around 753 BC, Rome faced many rivals for power on the peninsula, from the Greek colonies far to the south, to the Sabine peoples and Samnites to the east, to the Etruscans to the north.

The Etruscans struck first, taking most of Italy by 650 BC. The Etruscans would build new roads and buildings for the Romans, ruling them through monarchy. The Romans bristled under such foreign domination, but the Etruscans faced their own challenges from the Gauls. Slowly, they were worn down, and in 509 BC, Romans rose up and overthrew the Etruscan kings.

The republic had no written constitution as modern readers would understand, but law and tradition were paramount values for Romans. All offices had only one-year terms. Two men called *consuls* were elected to preside over the state and act as commanders-in-chief of the army. Three hundred men of the top Roman families made up the Senate. Initially only able to give advice, the senators saw that their influence would eventually have the force of law. The floor of the Senate, originally kept as dirt, reminded the barefoot senators that the common man trod the unpaved streets of Rome. As power increased for the upper classes, the dirt of the Senate floor was replaced with tile. Military men, especially the enlisted men, manned the popular assemblies giving the most modest Romans a voice, small as it was.

Rome was a male-dominated, hierarchical society. Men would rule their families as kings, and society itself was divided into different classes. Rome's code of laws, the Twelve Tables, was created in 450 BC and enforced class distinctions. Reforms by 287 BC technically gave all Romans equal legal rights, and the different classes could even intermarry, but the rich and powerful gave up none of their influence.

Roman religion was polytheistic, worshipping many gods who embodied the different forces of the world. Roman and Greek faiths gradually combined, with the Roman gods assuming the personae of the ancient Greek gods.

Meanwhile, Rome moved steadily to seize control of Italy. All the Latin tribes came to heel by 340 BC. The Samnites fell by 290 BC. The last Greek colonies in the south of Italy fell by 267 BC. The Etruscans fell in 264 BC. Rome destroyed their enemies mercilessly, but were just as lavish in their rewards to their friends. The confederation system ensured this new loyalty and stability. Latins, for instance, were granted full legal rights

and Roman citizenship, while other regions were given an affiliate status, allowing these communities to manage their own communities, provided they offered soldiers for Rome. These allies could gain full Roman citizenship, if deemed worthy, and participate in the whole range of Roman politics and the lucrative Roman economy.

With Carthage, Rome found a rival nearly as strong that also hoped to dominate the Mediterranean. Carthage, an old Phoenician colony founded in 800 BC in what is now northern Tunisia, forged a trade empire in the region in addition to building settlements from Iberia into the Pyrenees. Rome and Carthage fought bitterly in three wars, determined to destroy the other once and for all. The First Punic War began in 264 BC, due to disputes over nearby Sicily, and continued until 241 BC, with Rome wresting control away from Carthage.

Carthage demanded a rematch. With a new general, Hannibal, they promised their revenge. He launched a major attack on the Romans in 218 BC after they learned that Rome had been behind uprisings among Carthage's Iberian colonies. The Second Punic War lasted for seventeen years, with Hannibal nearly overpowering the Romans, but the Romans managed to stay just a step ahead. Rome, though its cities were under siege, rebuilt after its near-collapse early in the war and staged a massive new offensive in Africa, forcing Hannibal out of Italy. They reduced the once-mighty Carthage to a tiny state, barely able to defend itself. In the third and last Punic War of 149 to 146 BC, Rome quickly conquered and annexed them once and for all.

The East beckoned, and Rome answered. Rome had gained power in the eastern Mediterranean and annexed Macedonia by 148 BC. Two years later, a desperate and frightened Corinth rose up against Rome. Rome swept aside the resistance and annihilated them to dissuade any others who would ever dare the same. Greece was placed under a Roman governor.

But the Romans fell in love with the achievements of Greece, enamored with Greek art, literature, and science. They clamored for Greek knowledge and culture. Romans took the Greeks into slavery, forcing them to Rome in large numbers to practice their arts for Rome and even to teach their own children.

Seeing the proverbial writing on the wall, the king of Pergamum in Asia Minor in 133 BC offered his lands to Rome, bringing the Romans into the continent of Asia. Fifty years later, in 63 BC, Judea came under Roman authority, leaving Egypt and Mauretania in Northwest Africa as the only areas in the Mediterranean region not controlled by Rome. The Romans had time and ambition working in their favor at this stage, and both lands would be annexed in the coming decades.

Rome owned slaves in large numbers, and like any other slave-holding society in history, weathered numerous rebellions as the slaves attempted to gain their freedom. Roman slave owners had absolute power over their slaves, including the legal right to torture and kill their slaves whenever they wished. Brutality was the rule. Further, Roman law mandated that an assault or murder of any citizen at the hands of his slave would result in the execution of all slaves he owned. As with a rebelling city, the Romans left rebelling households with no survivors. Sicily became the scene of drawn-out, bloody dramas as slaves rose up on several occasions. Sicilian slaves rose up in 135 BC with more than 70,000 taking up arms. It took three years for the Roman army to crush the rebellion. Another Roman army with more than 17,000 troops crushed a new revolt on the island that lasted from 104 to 101 BC. In 73 BC, the leader of a new rebellion, Spartacus, launched his revolt in southern Italy with more than 70,000 slaves that challenged Roman control and demanded freedom. He had been a gladiator (and gladiators were almost always slaves) and outwitted the Romans for two years before his capture in 71 BC, ending the rebellion. The Romans crucified him and 6,000 of his followers along the Appian Way, the major road leading to Rome, as a warning to other slaves.

In Rome itself, equality was an illusion at best. What was supposed to be a system of equals in the mid-third century BC, started increasingly to become anything but that. Political power fell into fewer and fewer hands. For example, between 233 BC and 133 BC, 160 of the 200 consuls came from only 26 families. The aristocrats broke down into factions and scrambled for what influence was available. By the late second century BC, two idealistic reformers, Tiberius Gracchus and his brother, Gaius Gracchus, made a bold attempt to change to the Roman system through land reform. Rome would buy large estates and distribute them to the poor and middle classes. However, while these land redistribution efforts were popular among the general public, the rage and jealousy of the Senators spiraled out of control. They had both Gracchus brothers murdered. Increasingly, the tool for besting political rivals was bloodshed.

In a time of crisis, 107 BC, Marius was elected consul and reorganized the struggling army, raising troops from among the poorest of Romans and not the landholders, and demanding the troops swear loyalty to him directly instead of the Roman state. He crushed a rebellion in their own provinces and became consul for five consecutive years between 104 BC and 100 BC—an incredible tenure for an office that men were supposed to hold for only one year.

First Triumvirate

The aristocrats broke into open warfare among themselves, with the common man as a pawn in their quests for influence. Two major factions emerged: the optimates, who brazenly insisted on all power and privilege for the upper classes, and the populares, who claimed to speak for the common man, but their motives were not always altruistic. Eventually, power was consolidated into three men. These three, who united as the First Triumvirate by 60 BC, included Julius Caesar, a member of the populares who emulated Alexander; Crassus, the ultra-rich aristocrat whose military campaigns against Spartacus won him great fame; and Pompey, another military commander.

For his efforts in the alliance, Pompey won lands to reward his veteran troops and earned a new special military command in Iberia. Caesar set out to conquer Gaul (modern France) for Rome with his own quest. After his conquest, he staged an attempted invasion of Britain, but pulled back.

In 53 BC, Crassus died in battle in Syria in his campaigns against the Parthian Empire. Pompey returned to Rome afterward and fell in league with the faction of the optimates, who feared Caesar's growing success, popularity, and inability to be controlled by the old Senators. They demanded he cede control of his forces and come home. Caesar was now beyond being ordered.

Instead, he ordered his troops back into Italy to charge against his opponents, ultimately defeating Pompey's forces. Caesar now had total power in Rome.

Dictators were used for national emergencies generations before, but they had fallen out of favor. But few men had the power of Julius Caesar. In 47 BC, he was named dictator. In 44 BC, the Senate named Caesar dictator for life.

Caesar continued to keep the appearance of the republic intact. Elections continued, but Caesar's allies would almost certainly win. He packed the Senate, bringing in 600 new Senators dedicated to him, also ensuring that his allies would call the shots. He moved to make the government more efficient and introduced a new calendar system, which came to be known as the Julian calendar, a modification of the ancient Egyptian calendar with more familiar portions of the old calendar included. By the sixteenth century AD, the Julian calendar would be transformed into the Gregorian calendar now in use. He also founded a number of colonies aimed at giving land to Roman veterans. He began several ambitious projects and began planning new wars against Parthia in the east, similar to Crassus.

However, on the "ides of March," March 15, 44 BC, Julius Caesar was stabbed to death on the Senate floor by Marcus Brutus and a group of Senators. While they claimed they were trying to save the republic, the outcry instead caused yet another war of Roman against Roman.

Though Julius Caesar was dead, his allies still wielded influence. His forces quickly united to consolidate their power against the senatorial forces.

Second Triumvirate

Forming the Second Triumvirate, this included Caesar's nephew and adopted heir, Octavian Caesar; Caesar's trusted aide, Marc Antony; and Lepidus, a man of influence and wealth. The real power eventually lay with only Octavian and Antony. The senatorial forces met the triumvirs at the Battle of Philippi and found their final defeat in 42 BC on that field in Macedonia. To avoid capture and torture, Brutus killed himself. The triumphant Antony and Octavian then took their places for the next fight as the new triumvirate unraveled. Octavian went to Rome, and Antony headed to Egypt to take up Julius Caesar's military plans against Parthia.

The queen of Egypt, Cleopatra VII, was from the old Ptolemaic line and had her brother/husband, Ptolemy XIII, murdered. She also had an affair with Julius Caesar, resulting in the birth of his son, Caesarion. Now

Antony was captivated by her, engaging in a scandalous affair while his wife waited in Rome. Octavian used this relationship to turn public opinion against Antony, attacking Cleopatra as a usurper of Rome. Antony and Cleopatra considered a Roman-Egyptian alliance to forge a newer and more powerful empire in the Mediterranean region and into Parthian lands in the East, but misfortune derailed these plans. At the same time, Octavian built his influence with the aristocrats and set his sights on Egypt.

Greece again became the sight of another turn of Rome's fortune. Cleopatra and Antony's naval fleet met the forces of Octavian at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. The Egyptian fleet was wrecked. Antony and Cleopatra sailed away as quickly as they could. Octavian stayed in close pursuit. With Octavian's attacks in Egypt upon his landing, Antony's forces were easily dispatched. Suicide, again, was the preference to capture, and Antony and Cleopatra took their own lives. Caesarion was also killed on Octavian's orders to avoid any possible threat to his power.

Octavian was now master of the Roman world, with no one left with the strength to oppose him. He collected new titles and powers of the offices of the republic like trophies, building his power ever higher and consolidating all the power of Rome onto himself. By 27 BC, Octavian's power was without challenge, and he began his reign as emperor. The age of the Roman Empire had dawned.

Suggested Reading

The following textbook is optional. It has additional readings that correspond with the topics covered in the course textbook, and you may find these sources interesting. You will not be tested on any information from this textbook:

McKay, J. P., Crowston, C. H., Weisner-Hanks, M. E., & Perry, J. (2014). *Sources for western society: From antiquity to the enlightenment* (3rd ed., Vol. 1). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.