SLOPPY NOTES

CHAPTER 1 - The Legacy of the Roman Empire

Name and Date: _____
Text: HISTORY ALIVE! The Medieval World

MARK YOUR TEXT FIRST

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1.1 The Legacy of the Roman Empire Introduction

"All roads lead to Rome," boasted the ancient Romans. For 500 years, from about 27 B.C.E. to 476 C.E., the city of Rome was the capital of the greatest empire the world had ever seen. Road markers for thousands of miles showed the distance to Rome. But the empire's 50 million people were connected by more than roads. They were also connected by Roman law, Roman customs, and Roman military might.

At its height, around 200 C.E., the Roman Empire spanned the whole of the Mediterranean world, from northern Africa to the Scottish border, from Spain to Syria. During this time, the Roman world was generally peaceful and prosperous. There was one official language and one code of law. Roman soldiers guarded the frontiers and kept order within the empire's boundaries. Proud Romans believed that the empire would last forever.

But the empire did not last. By the year 500, the western half of this great empire had **collapsed**. For historians, the fall of Rome marks the end of the ancient world and the beginning of the Middle Ages.

As one historian has written, "Rome perished, yet it lived on." The medieval world would pass on many aspects of Roman culture that still affect us today.

In this chapter, you will discover how and why the Roman Empire fell. Then you will learn how Rome's influence lives on in so many ways today—in art, architecture and engineering, language and writing, and philosophy, law, and citizenship.

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1.2 The End of the Roman Empire in the West

Rome's first emperor, Caesar Augustus, ended 100 years of civil war and expanded the boundaries of the **Roman Empire**. When he died in 14 C.E., few Romans could imagine that their **empire** would ever end. Yet by the year 500, the western half of the empire had collapsed. What caused the fall of the mighty Roman Empire?

Problems in the Late Empire There was no single reason for the end of the Roman Empire. Instead, historians point to a number of problems that combined to bring about its fall.

Political Instability Rome never solved the problem of how to peacefully transfer political power to a new leader. When an emperor died, ambitious rivals with independent armies often fought each other for control of the empire.

Even when the transfer of power happened without **conflict**, there was no good system for choosing the next emperor. Many times, the Praetorian Guard, the emperor's private army, chose the new ruler. But they frequently chose leaders who would reward them rather than those who were best prepared to be emperor.

Economic and Social Problems Besides political instability, the empire suffered from economic and social problems. To finance Rome's huge armies, its citizens had to pay heavy taxes. These taxes weakened the economy and drove many people into poverty. Trade also suffered.

Unemployment was a serious problem. Wealthy families used slaves and cheap labor to work their large estates. Small farmers could not compete with the large landowners. They fled to the cities looking for work, but there were not enough jobs for everyone.

Other social problems plagued the empire, including growing **corruption** and a **decline** in the spirit of citizenship. Notorious emperors like Nero and Caligula wasted large amounts of money. A rise in crime made the empire's cities and roads unsafe.

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1.2 Continued

Weakening Frontiers A final problem was the weakening of the empire's frontiers. The huge size of the empire made it hard to defend. It sometimes took weeks for leaders in Rome to communicate with generals. By the 300s C.E., Germanic tribes were pressing hard on the western borders of the empire. Many of these peoples went on to settle inside the empire and were recruited into the army. But often these soldiers had little loyalty to Rome.

The Fall of Rome In 330 C.E., the emperor **Constantine** took a step that changed the future of the Roman Empire. He moved his capital 850 miles east, to the ancient city of Byzantium. He renamed the city New Rome. Later, it was called Constantinople. In modern times it was renamed yet again. Today, it is known as Istanbul, Turkey.

After Constantine's reign, the vast empire was usually ruled by two emperors, one based in Rome and one based in Constantinople. Rome became the capital of just the western part of the empire. Constantinople was the capital of the eastern part of the empire.

The emperors in Rome soon found themselves threatened by invading Germanic tribes. In 410 C.E., one of these tribes attacked and looted Rome itself. Finally, in 476, the last emperor in the west was driven from his throne. The western half of the empire began to dissolve into separate kingdoms.

In the east, the empire continued for another 1,000 years. Today, we refer to this eastern empire as the Byzantine Empire, after Byzantium, the original name of its capital city.

In western Europe, Rome's fall did not mean the end of Roman civilization. The influence of Rome lived on through the medieval period and all the way to our time. As you read about the legacy of the Romans, think about how ideas and events from the distant past still affect us today.

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1.3 The Legacy of Roman Art

The Romans adopted many features of other cultures and blended them into their own, **unique** culture. This was true of Roman art. The Romans were especially influenced by the art of the Greeks. In fact, historians often speak of "Greco-Roman" art. Rome played a vital role in passing on this tradition, which has had a major influence on western art.

The Romans added their own talents and tastes to what they learned from other cultures. For example, they imitated Greek sculpture, but Roman sculptors were particularly good at making lifelike busts and statues.

Romans were also great patrons, or sponsors, of art. Wealthy families decorated their homes with statues and colorful murals and **mosaics**. Roman artists were especially skilled in painting frescoes, scenes painted on the moist plaster of walls or ceilings with water-based paints. Roman frescoes often showed three-dimensional landscapes. Looking at one of these frescoes was almost like looking through the wall at a view outside. You've probably seen similar murals in restaurants, banks, and other modern public buildings.

American artists often adopted a Roman style to add nobility to sculptures and paintings of heroes. Here you see a Roman statue of the emperor Augustus (left) and an American statue of general and first president George Washington (right). How are the statues alike?

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1.4 The Legacy of Roman Architecture and Engineering

The Romans were skilled and clever builders. In their architecture and engineering, they borrowed ideas from the Greeks and other peoples. But the Romans improved on these ideas in ways that future engineers and architects would imitate.

Architecture The Romans learned how to use the arch, the vault, and the dome to build huge structures. A vault is an arch used for a ceiling or to support a ceiling or roof. A dome is a vault in the shape of a half-circle that rests on a circular wall.

Roman baths and other public buildings often had great arched vaults. The Pantheon, a magnificent temple that still stands in Rome, is famous for its huge dome. The Romans used concrete to help them build much bigger arches than anyone had attempted before. Concrete is made by mixing broken stone with sand, cement, and water and allowing the mixture to harden. The Romans did not invent the material, but they were the first to make widespread use of it.

The Romans also invented a new kind of stadium. These large, open-air structures could seat thousands of spectators. The Romans used concrete to build tunnels into the famous stadium in Rome, the Colosseum. The tunnels made it easy for spectators to reach their seats. Modern football stadiums still use this feature.

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1.4 The Legacy of Roman Architecture and Engineering Continued

The grand style of Roman buildings has inspired many architects through the centuries. Early medieval architects, for example, frequently imitated Roman designs, especially in building great churches and cathedrals. You can also see a Roman influence in the design of many modern churches, banks, and government buildings. A fine example is the Capitol building, the home of the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C.

Another Roman innovation that has been widely copied is the triumphal arch. This is a huge monument built to celebrate great victories or achievements. A famous example is the Arc de Triomphe (Arch of Triumph) in Paris, France. This monument celebrates the victories of the French emperor Napoleon in the early 1800s. Today, it is the national war memorial of France.

Engineering The Romans changed engineering as well as architecture. They were the greatest builders of roads, bridges, and **aqueducts** in the ancient world.

More than 50,000 miles of road connected Rome with the frontiers of the empire. The Romans built their roads with layers of stone, sand, and gravel. Their techniques set the standard of road building for 2,000 years. People in some parts of Europe still drive on highways built over old Roman roads.

The Romans also set a new standard for building aqueducts. They created a system of aqueducts for Rome that brought water from about 60 miles away to the homes of the city's wealthiest citizens, as well as to its public baths and fountains. The Romans built aqueducts in other parts of the empire as well. The water system in Segovia, Spain, still uses part of an ancient Roman aqueduct. Roman arches from aqueducts can still be found in Europe, North Africa, and Southwest Asia.

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1.5 The Legacy of Roman Language and Writing

An especially important legacy of Rome for people in medieval times was the Romans' language, Latin. After the fall of the empire, Latin continued to be used by scholars and the Roman Catholic Church. Church **scribes** used Latin to create important **documents**. Educated European nobles learned Latin so they could communicate with their peers in other countries.

Latin remains extremely influential. Several modern European languages developed from Latin, including Italian, Spanish, and French. English is a Germanic language, but it was strongly influenced by the French-speaking Normans, who conquered England in 1066 C.E. English has borrowed heavily from Latin, both directly and by way of French. In fact, we still use the Latin alphabet, although Latin has 23 letters and English has 26.

You can see the influence of Latin in many of the words we use today. For example, our calendar comes from the one adopted by the Roman ruler Julius Caesar. The names of several months come from Latin. August honors Caesar Augustus. September comes from Latin words meaning "the seventh month." (The Roman year started in March, so September was the seventh month.) October means "the eighth month." Can you guess the meanings of the words *November* and *December*? Latin also remains very important in the subjects of the law, medicine, and religion, as well.

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1.5 The Legacy of Roman Language and Writing Continued

Many English words start with Latin prefixes. A prefix is a word part placed at the beginning of a word that carries its own meaning. Attaching a prefix to a root word creates a new word with a new meaning. In fact, the word *prefix* was formed this way. It comes from *pre-* ("in front of") and *-fix* ("fasten" or "attach"). The chart on this page shows other examples.

As you can see from the chart, other English words come from Latin root words. For instance, the words *manual and manipulate* are derived from the Latin word *manus*, meaning "hand."

Even Latin **proverbs** are still in use. For example, look at the reverse side of a U.S. penny. There you'll see the U.S. motto *E pluribus unum* ("Out of many, one").

Finally, we still use Roman numerals. The Romans used a system of letters to write numbers. In the Roman numeral system, the letters I, V, X, L, C, D, and M represent 1, 5, 10, 50, 100, 500, and 1,000. You may have seen Roman numerals used on clocks, sundials, and the first pages of books. You might also spot Roman numerals on buildings and in some movie and television credits to show the year in which they were made.

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1.6 The Legacy of Roman Philosophy, Law, and Citizenship

Roman **philosophy**, law, and ideas about citizenship were greatly influenced by the Greeks. But the Romans made contributions of their own that they passed on to future generations.

A Philosophy Called Stoicism A Greek school of thought that was especially popular in Rome was Stoicism (STOH-ihk-ism). Many upper-class Romans adopted this philosophy and made it their own. Stoics believed that a divine (godly) intelligence ruled all of nature. A person's soul was a spark of that divine intelligence. "Living rightly" meant living in a way that agreed with nature.

To the Stoics, the one truly good thing in life was to have a good character. This meant having virtues such as self-control and courage. Stoics prized duty and the welfare of their community over personal comfort. Roman Stoics were famous for bearing pain and suffering bravely and quietly. To this day, we call someone who behaves in this way "stoic."

Law and Justice Roman law covered marriages, inheritances, and contracts (agreements) between people, as well as countless other areas of daily life. Modern legal codes in European countries like France and Italy are based in part on ancient Roman laws.

Another legacy of the Romans was the Roman idea of justice. The Romans believed that there was a universal law of justice that came from nature. By this natural law, every person had rights. Judges in Roman courts tried to make just, or fair, decisions that respected people's rights.

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1.6 The Legacy of Roman Philosophy, Law, and Citizenship Continued

Like people everywhere, the Romans did not always live up to their ideals. Their courts did not treat the poor or slaves equally with the rich. Emperors often made laws simply because they had the power to do so. But the ideals of Roman law and justice live on. For example, the ideas of natural law and natural rights are echoed in the Declaration of Independence. Modern-day judges, like judges in Roman courts, often make decisions based on ideals of justice as well as on written law. Similarly, many people around the world believe that all humans have basic rights that no written law can take away.

Citizenship When Rome first began expanding its power in Italy, to be a "Roman" was to be a citizen of the city-state of Rome. Over time, however, Rome's leaders gradually extended citizenship to all free people in the empire. Even someone born in Syria, in Southwest Asia, or in Gaul (modern-day France) could claim to be Roman. All citizens were subject to and protected by Roman law, enjoyed the same rights, and owed allegiance (loyalty) to the emperor.

The idea of citizenship as both a privilege and a responsibility has descended from Roman times to our own. While most people in the United States are citizens by birth, many immigrants become citizens by solemnly promising loyalty to the United States. Regardless of where they were born, all citizens have the same responsibilities. For example, they must obey the law. And all enjoy the same basic rights spelled out in the Constitution and its amendments, including the Bill of Rights.

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