This course concerns the history of the Roman Empire—that vast region extending from Britain to the Sahara and from the Atlantic to Syria—from the mid-first century B.C. to the sixth century A.D. We shall consider the evolution of the system of government which made possible the administration of the empire, the economic activities and social patterns which characterized the empire, and the beliefs and values motivating individuals and groups within the empire. The world of the Roman Empire appeared to contemporaries of the second century A.D. stable, prosperous, and everlasting—the final stage in the history of human society. It was not, as it turned out, and we shall consider the fundamental changes, including the spread of Christianity, which transformed the empire by the early fourth century. Finally, we shall examine the factors responsible for the decline of the empire in the west during the fifth and sixth centuries.

In addition to the continuous narrative history provided by the textbook (Heichelheim, Yeo, and Ward), students will read various ancient works as assigned. Discussions are integrated into the lecture format, and students are expected to have completed the readings for a given class by the class meeting.

There will be two one-hour examinations, a final (non-cumulative examination), and two 4-6 page papers on assigned topics.

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Books required

Heichelheim, Yeo, and Ward, A History of the Roman People
Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars
Pliny, Letters
Apuleius, Golden Ass
Marcus Aurelius, Meditations
Augustine, Confessions

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Schedule of Lectures/Reading Assignments

1/21  Introduction
1/23  To Gaius Julius Caesar  HYW 198-208
1/26  Octavian's Early Career  HYW 209-216
1/28  Struggle with Antony  HYW 216-223
1/30  The Principate  HYW 246-265; Suetonius, Augustus, 51-108
The Empire under Augustus  HYW 265-294

Julio-Claudians I HYW 295-306; Suetonius, Tiberius, 101-145
Julio-Claudians II HYW 307-317; Suetonius, Nero, 209-214
Year of the 4 Emperors HYW 318-320
Flavians HYW 320-328; Suetonius, Domitian, 243-309

City of Rome
The Provinces and the Army
FIRST EXAM
Romans and Jews
The Jewish Revolt Tacitus, handout
Jesus in Historical Context

Primitive Christianity
Good Emperors, Good Times HYW 329-344
Roman Law and Legal Practices

Roman Culture HYW 345-372; Pliny, Letters, Books 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10

Spring Break

Stoicism M. Aurelius, Meditations
Religions in the Roman Empire Apuleius, Golden Ass, 33-104, 148-164, 234-255
Evolution of Christianity HYW 359-361
Septimius Severus HYW 373-380
Later Severans HYW 380-383

Third-century Crisis HYW 384-391
SECOND EXAM

Recovery HYW 391-395
Social and Political Consequences HYW 396-414

Diocletian HYW 415-426
Constantine HYW 426-430

Spring Holiday

Autocracy of Late Empire
Constantine as Christian Emperor HYW 430-437
Persistence of Paganism: Julian HYW 438-444
Theodosius
Social/Economic Developments HYW 445-463
Augustine HWY 464-488; Confessions, 43-228
Barbarian Settlements HYW 489-498
4/29  Culture of the Late Empire  HYW 529-541
5/1  Decline of Empire in West  HYW 499-505
5/4  Age of Justinian  HYW 506-523
5/5  Legacy of the Roman Empire  HYW 541-546

5/11  THIRD EXAM  12-3