Course Description:

The evolution of Rome’s republican constitution and the demise of that constitution has come under intense scrutiny from the late second century BCE to the present day. Even as the republican constitution showed signs of stress contemporary Romans speculated on what lessons could be learned from studying its foundation and growth. Today, scholars from many disciplines and popular journalists use Rome’s struggles as a metaphor for contemporary events. The same has happened at many earlier historical moments including the French revolution, the Haitian revolution, Cromwell’s commonwealth, and more. This seminar provides a foundational understanding of the rise and fall of Roman republican constitution (in the broadest socio-cultural definition of that term) as reconstructed by leading ancient historians today and an exploration of the reception and historiography of the Roman republic in its own day and later historical periods. Participants will be strongly encouraged to develop projects related to their own period(s) of interest and draw on prior academic and lived experiences. No prior knowledge of the ancient world is required. The instructor particularly welcomes those interested in the expression of political ideologies through visual media and the arts.

Learning Outcomes:

- gain familiarity with Roman constitutional forms and its later reception
- practice digital humanities research techniques during a pandemic
- develop a topic and written work from preliminary stages to polished final product
- distinguish how different historical periods and subdisciplines understand ‘primary evidence’
- reflect on the methodologies and research questions that most lend themselves to cross-period comparative histories
- consider the role of analogy in the work of the public historian and the reception of history by the general public

Instructor:
Liv Mariah Yarrow (she/her)

My first name is pronounced Leev. While I am your instructor or in contexts where our different professional rank matters, please address me as Prof. Yarrow.

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Good things to know about me:

I’ve learning disabilities. You may notice typos related to this: I’ve particular difficulty with suffixes and also small words (in both cases simply missing them or using the wrong one). You may also notice the remnants of a speech impediment or other major/minor motor skill issues, often appearing that I am ‘clumsy’. It also affects my spoken language acquisition and very occasionally my disambiguation of sounds/tones.

I live in PA and co-parent two 5-year-olds. Zooming may be disrupted by children on occasion. Besides our seminar, I tend to work/email only during business hours 9-5 EST to preserve work/life balance. On occasion I will take an evening appointment for a one-to-one meeting, esp. for students who schedules do not allow meeting otherwise.

I trained in Britain and this means much of my academic outlook tends towards a UK rather than US perspective.

My primary areas of research are the Roman republic, particularly numismatics and historiography.

Graded Elements:

50% - Seminar participation and preparation (including fulfillment of role of discussion starter)
30% - Three short essays on pre agreed topics; one must be based on research in a digitized historical archive and one must be on a visual primary evidence. These are graded on engagement, not polish. 1,500-2,000 words each.
20% - final paper, Chicago style bibliography-footnotes. This should be well developed original work building on one or more of your short essays.

Expectations:

All readings will be in the dropbox folder. Begin your week by reading the roadmap in the week’s folder. Do not just dive into the readings. Readings may not appear until the week they are due. This course is new and thus I may adapt readings and units to better intersect with the interests of members of the seminar.

Each class (after the first one) will begin by me posing to the discussion starter: Where should we start? What did you find interesting in the readings? We will then spend about an hour working your reactions to the roadmap and readings. You will likely be asked to share your screen at some point each class to help us all see a passage or image you think is relevant to the discussion. The second half of class will be more of a lecture Q/A session where we review the roadmap for the next assignment and I talk about what to watch out for.

Set aside approximately 9 hours to prepare for each seminar meeting. If you’ve put in this time, you should not worry if you’ve not completed everything I might have recommended. I’m more interested in earnest engagement that completion. There will be weeks where you’ve done more and weeks where you’ve done less. On weeks where you’ve done significantly less, please email me ahead of time and let me know what you’ve been able to do. This will help me facilitate the meeting and not put you on the spot.

Actively participate all Zoom meetings, 4.15-6:15 pm Thursdays as scheduled. More than one absence without significant reason may negatively affect your final grade. You are never required to have your
camera on, but if you can have it on, think of it as a gift to the rest of us who will better be able to see your facial reactions and body language.

I am open to asynchronous work replacing some of our Zoom meeting using instead hypothes.is to co-read and annotate the materials BUT this would need to be a group discussion.

Weeks where you are the discussion starter, come prepared with a set of questions and materials that are likely to engage your peers.

Work with the instructor to design short essay topics and a final project that is meaningful to your work in the field.

Do not assume others in the class share your views or lived experience. Listen to others and respond as you would wish others to respond to you. Support your views with evidence. Acknowledge what you might not know. Be aware that not all conversations may be easy. If something makes you uncomfortable feel free to discuss it with the instructor one-to-one.

Schedule:

Topics, especially those later in the semester, are open to negotiation based on group interest.

Feb 4, (1) Practicalities of the Course and Intro to Roman Republic
Feb 11, (2) Chronological Historical Developments at Rome (focused on constitution)
Feb 18, (3) Key Cultural Factors at Rome: Militarism and Religiosity – one-to-one meeting on research interests with Professor must have been held by this date
Feb 25, (4) Contemporary “Hot-Takes” on the RR vs Today - First short paper due (possible guest) 9 am
Mar 4, (5) “Serious academic discourse” on Republicanism - (possible guest)
Mar 11, (6) Polybius and his reception
Mar 18, (7) Cato and his reception
Mar 25, (8) Cicero and his reception – Second short paper due 9 am
Apr 8, (9) Imperial Nostalgia
Apr 15, (10) Renaissance re ‘discoveries’
Apr 22, (11) The European justification of Colonial and Imperial endeavors – Third short paper due 9 am
Apr 29, (12) Pre Civil War US perspectives
May 6, (13) Haitian and Bolivian perspectives
May 13, (14) Matters Arising (Final Project for Comment and Revision DUE!)
May 27, 9 am – Final Projects due for grading, no written comments given for work turned in after this date and time.

Ideas for Final Projects:

- The Cincinnatus tradition in US politics
- Freemason reception of the Roman Republic
- American slavery: (dis)continuities with Roman traditions
- Rhetorics of Decline and Restoration
- The freedman’s cap (pileus) in state sponsored art
- Recollections of A Roman Hero (e.g. Scipio? Cornelia? Lucretia? Brutus?)
- Trends in Education: How is the Republic taught?
- Poetic allusions to the Republic over time or at a specific period
• Rome on Stage, Shakespeare? Marlowe? Addison? Others?
• DuBois’s vision of Rome
• You don’t have to pick any of these, but they will help get us started talking!