THE ROMAN EMPERORS

The good, the bad and the crazy
CAESAR AUGUSTUS

- Julius Caesar’s 18 year old nephew named Octavian
- Formed a second triumvirate with Mark Antony and Marcus Lepidus
- They defeated Brutus and Cassius
- Alliance broke apart and Octavian would become Rome’s first emperor
- He will be given the title “Augustus” or “highest one”
AUGUSTUS’ REIGN (31 BCE- 14 CE)

- Absolute power in Roman emperor
- Always tried to avoid appearing like he had “too much power”
- Did not flaunt his authority
- Preferred to be called “princeps” or “first citizen”
AUGUSTUS’ ACHIEVEMENTS

- Defense: established the Praetorian Guard (nine cohorts of 500 men who acted bodyguards for the emperor and his family)
- New administrative system for the large expanding empire (Senate controlled settled provinces, Emperor new frontier provinces)
- Continued granting citizenship to people in the provinces
- Introduced a more uniform tax system to promote equal and fair treatment of the provinces
- Established a civil service to enhance the workings of government
- Encouraged religion, using to encourage the simple life and to strengthen morality which he felt was slipping
- Beautified Rome “found it in brick and left it in marble”
Beginning Pax Romana
TIBERIUS (14 CE – 37 CE)

- Stepson of Augustus
- Designated Augustus’ successor when others died
- Morose and suspicious
- Unpopular because he spent little money on public games
- Good administrator and economist
- Became old and senile
- Smothered to death
GAIUS “CALIGULA” (little boots)

- Unbalanced nephew of Tiberius
- Also unpopular
- Megalomaniac
- Tried to make his horse a senator
- Murdered by a member of the Praetorian Guard
CLAUDIUS (41 CE – 54 CE)

- Uncle of Caligula
- Ungainly, doltish appearance
- An excellent organizer
- Expanded the bureaucracy
- Served poisoned mushrooms by his fourth wife
NERO (54 CE – 68 CE)

- Son of Claudius
- Killed his own mother (tried to poison, drowning, then just had her executed)
- Considered a tyrant
- Ordered assassination of real and imagined enemies
- Artist and poet (mostly self-proclaimed)
- Supposedly fiddled as Rome burnt
- Blamed the fire on the Christians and persecuted them
- Committed suicide, had a companion stab him
CIVIL WAR (68 CE - 69 CE)

- Four men: Galba, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian all struggle for power
VESPARASION (69 AD – 79 AD)

- Eventually won control in the civil war and consolidated the Empire which had begun to fragment
- Granted citizenship to non-Italian
- Stabilized government spending
- Replenished the treasury
- Built roads
- Most famous for sacking Jerusalem, destroying the Temple, and dispersing the Jews in 70 CE
TITUS (79 CE – 81 CE)

- Son of Vespasian
- Known as “the light of the world”
- Very popular
- Ruled during the destruction of Pompeii
- Finished the construction of the Colosseum
DOMITIAN (81 CE – 96 CE)

- Brother of Titus
- “Holy Terror”
- Murdered after 15 years by people in his own household
- Persecuted Jews and Christians
- Otherwise governed well
THE FIVE GOOD EMPERORS

- After Nero’s death, the Senate and the army played a more active role in the selection of the emperor.
- Between 96 CE and 180 CE, the Romans handled the problem of succession by having each emperor select a younger colleague to train as a successor.
- Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antonius Pius, and Marcus Aurelius.
- Resulted in almost a century of stability.
NERVA (96 CE – 98 CE)

- Older, gentler senator
- Elected emperor by the Senate
- Began tradition of the present ruler finding and adopting the “best man” and making him successor
TRAJAN (98 CE – 117 CE)

- First Roman emperor of non-Italian origin (Spanish)
- Great ruler
- Extended the Empire to its greatest extent
- Kept the Senate informed about his campaigns, and waited for their approval before signing treaties
- Popular with the public because he greatly increased Rome’s wealth through military conquest
- Also popular because spent large sums on building aqueducts, temples and public baths
- Also very popular with the army
- Buried under his column in the Roman Forum
TRAJAN
Monument
HADRIAN (117 CE – 138 CE)

- Brilliant and versatile
- Excellent administrator and brave soldier
- He consolidated the Empire and built walls in Scotland and along the Rhine River to contain the Barbarians
- Gifted architect
- Built the Pantheon
- Constructed the Castel Saint Angelo, a beautiful fortress tomb which still stands in Rome.
THE PANTHEON
CASTLE SAINT ANGELO
ANTONIUS (138 CE – 161 CE)

- Just and honest
- Empire reached its peak under his guidance
- Ruled during years of tranquility
- His death is associate by many with the end of the Pax Romana
MARCUS AURELIUS (161CE–180 CE)

- Ruled during times of trouble during which barbarians rose in many areas
- Plague also killed \( \frac{1}{4} \) of the people in the Republic during his reign
- Stoic
COMMODUS (180 CE – 192 CE)

- Son of Marcus Aurelius
- Unfit, broke the tradition of “best man”
- Fought in the gladiatorial contests
- Poor ruler
- Strangled to death in his bath
LATE EMPIRE

- For the next 300 years, we will witness the decline of the Empire.
- After Commodus, the throne was up for auction.
- 192 – 193 several men tried to gain power by buying loyalty of different armies.
SEPTIMUS SEVERUS (193 – 211)

- Had best army, so seized power
- Catered to the army to hold power
- Let the men go soft, allowed families to travel with them (slowed them down)
- Admitted barbarians to army
CARCALLA (211 -217)

- Son of Septimius Severus
- Brutal, unpleasant man who murdered his brother to gain the throne
- Raised the army wages
- bribed barbarians to stay away from Rome
- Taxes increased dramatically and currency lost its value (inflation)
SEVERUS ALEXANDER (222 – 235)

- Continued practice of bribing the Barbarians
- Murdered by his own troops who still had some pride
MILITARY ANARCHY (265 – 284)

- 100 claimants to the throne
- 26 took the title for an average of 2 years
- All of them violent end
- Valerian captured by the Persians and stuffed as a trophy
- Plagues and constant wars
- Taxes skyrocketed
- Citizens tried to give up citizenship
- Back to barter economy because of inflation
DIOCLETIAN (284 – 305)

- Restored some semblance of order
- Only emperor to retire (Yugoslavia)
CONSTANTINE

- Ruled with 4 others from 305 – 324
- Ruled alone from 324 – 337
- 312 had a religious vision, seeing a cross and so became a Christian
- Passed the Edict of Milan in 313 which granted religious toleration
- As Western Empire collapsed, moved to Constantinople and made it the capital city
EMPIRE SPLITS

- The Empire permanently is divided into East and West. One emperor ruling in Ravenna and the other in Constantinople in 395.
- Christianity becomes the state religion.
- Other pagan and religious festivals are banned.
END OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE

- 410 Huns sack Rome
- 455 Vandals sack Rome
- 476 Romulus Augustus the last Western Roman Emperor is replaced by a German barbarian chieftain
- This event marks the Fall of the Roman Empire
- 800 Charlemagne becomes the “Holy Roman Emperor” but the empire was never restored.