The Legacy of Roman Philosophy, law and Citizenship (HA)

Roman **philosophy** **[philosophy: the study of wisdom, knowledge, and the nature of reality]** , 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.

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The emperor Marcus Aurelius was a devoted Stoic. He wrote about this philosophy of life in his Meditations. Many people are still inspired by the ideas in this book.

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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.

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..