

Cicero's *Civitas*: Friendship as Fundamental to Citizenship

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Abstract

Utilizing texts from Roman political thinker Marcus Tullius Cicero, this project seeks to establish a Ciceronian conception of citizenship rooted in overarching themes in his political dialogues, aspects which include the necessity for friendship, equality among men, and motivations in and beyond the physical realm. *De re publica*, *De officiis*, *De legibus*, *Laelius de amicitia*, and *Pro Archia Poeta* provide valuable evidence for the critical failings of the United States in light of the increasing polarization of citizens, as well as resources for ways to ameliorate the estrangement between citizens, as well as between citizens and their government.

The role of the citizen in Cicero's commonwealth is simple: place the good of the Republic before all else, and the Republic will keep you safe. However, within the nuances of what it means to place the Republic before one's self lies Cicero's own conception of citizenship, unique in its emphasis on equality and somewhat obtuse to the social hierarchy established in Rome at the time. Offered by a citizen of a formerly powerful republic, Cicero's theories may serve as an admonishment to the contemporary United States, but also a hopeful guide for how to maintain a healthy commonwealth and the relationships of the citizens within it.

Introduction

Since the unique outcome of the 2016 election, many scholars, politicians, media professionals, and social media users have looked far into the past, morosely predicting that the United States is soon to crumble as did our predecessors in the ill-fated Roman Republic. On one hand, many of the general fears of “becoming Rome” are overblown.¹ About two thousand years of honing the idea of empire and republic separates us from the Romans, not to mention immense technological advancement. However, during a time of uncertainty in regards to American identity and citizenship, one may look back in admiration at a particular Roman’s conception of citizenship: politician, philosopher, and orator Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Throughout several of his works, Cicero describes what it means to be a good citizen, and in doing so, he created his own vigorous idea of citizenship, which extends far beyond the simplistic legal realm and into the existential and imaginary. A Ciceronian conception of citizenship relies on community, and finding one’s identity within it; it favors friendship as a crucial source of virtue, and a prerequisite for being a good citizen. But, perhaps most importantly, it requires citizens to place the commonwealth before their personal or private lives. This level of civic devotion to the nation that he calls for may seem exorbitant or even unrealistic. Yet these aspects of Ciceronian citizenship not only explain some of America’s critical failings when it comes to both protection and civic engagement of the citizen, but also how it may add nuance to the meaning of citizenship, in turn bolstering the role of the citizen.

While citizenship evolved in Roman concepts and practices from the creation of the society to the dramatic fall, this project will focus specifically on the late Roman Republic. The

¹ Holland, “Decline and fall: why America always thinks it’s going the way of Rome,” *Spectator*, 2018.

primary sources examined here are *De legibus*, *De officiis*, *Laelius de Amicitia*, *De re publica*, and *Pro Archia Poeta*, all authored by Cicero throughout his life, from consulship, to exile, to his controversial return to Rome in his final years.² Ranging from political handbooks, to philosophical texts, to a defense in a court case, these texts provide a multifaceted impression of Ciceronian citizenship.

Pro Archia Poeta, was originally defended in 63 B.C.E, just after the Italian social wars, during Cicero's consulship, and just before his exile following the Cataline conspiracy. Cicero here defends the citizenship of Archias, his childhood tutor, after the public records of his eligibility for citizenship were burned in a fire during the war. *Pro Archia* is fundamentally a court testimony, and will be treated as such—implying that drawing conclusions about Cicero's ultimate view on citizenship from exclusively this speech is methodologically suspect, insofar as he is appealing to an understanding of how citizenship was defended in the late Roman Republic when legally challenged. Excerpts of *Pro Archia Poeta* used in this project are an original translation.

De legibus and *De re publica*, written between 54 and 51 BCE, have been regarded as “the most significant surviving contribution to political thought” between Aristotle and Augustine, and are understood to be Rome's versions of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*.³ In these dialogues, Cicero sketches what it means to be a good citizen, a virtuous leader, and how to live a just and moral life. Functioning as political texts, these offered a deep insight into the nuances of Cicero's conception of citizenship, beyond just serving the fatherland or being loyal to the commonwealth.

² Zetzel, *On the Commonwealth* Introduction, xlix-lii

³ Zetzel, *On the Commonwealth* Introduction, vii; xv

De officiis and *Laelius de amicitia* were both composed in 44 BCE, the final year of Cicero's life, as he returned from exile with an unapologetic contempt for his once-beloved republic. He composed *De officiis* in lieu of a visit to his son, and it serves as advice on how to effectively lead the populus virtuously, and how to place the commonwealth before oneself. He identifies the qualities of fair and equitable leaders, and how they differ from despotic ones. Given that he composed this late in life, it can be assumed that it was a culmination of years of watching different leadership styles triumph and fail, and a set of conclusions about what may be learned from leaders' mistakes to preserve the degenerating Republic. *Laelius de amicitia* is a recollection of his early mentor Laelius' conception of friendship as one of the highest virtues, something citizens should pursue consciously throughout their life. *De Amicitia* reveals the idiosyncrasies of Roman relationships: that is, the hierarchy of their social structure did not have as much weight when it came to maintaining good friendships, which should be a top priority. Instead, this text asks readers to be equitable in their relationships, as they are only as good as their "inferior" (*De amicitia*, 179). This text was crucial in solidifying a Ciceronian conception of citizenship as it places friendship and goodwill at the forefront of relationship building, and identifies how genuine friendship is for being a good republican citizen.⁴

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Secondary Research

Numerous sources cover Roman citizenship in a general and legal sense. In terms of understanding how citizenship functioned legally, Atkins, Lane, and Champion provide concise and valuable insights. In Chapter 3 of *Roman Political Thought*, Atkins expands on the driving force behind people seeking Roman citizenship. More than anything on his account, citizenship brought valuable security and legal protection.⁵ Champion supports this by claiming that “Roman citizenship had more to do with legal status and cultural identity than active imperial citizenship.”⁶ Furthermore, Champion addresses the diversity of the Roman citizenry, and how the Roman founders were “wanderers and exiles,” asserting that this informed the philosophy of citizenship in the following centuries.⁷ Atkins’ and Champion’s findings were useful when it came to identifying roots of the existential conditions of citizenship, such as collective identity.

Melissa Lane’s *The Birth of Politics* identifies the numerous ways Roman citizenship was unique for its time, and how those idiosyncrasies apply to the contemporary United States, including the rights to freedmen, hierarchy in Roman citizenship and public voting assemblies, and other freedoms Roman citizens had, including the right to worship one’s own preferred

⁵ Atkins, *Roman Political Thought*, 69

⁶ Champion, “Imperial Ideologies...” 95

⁷ Champion, 93

gods—so long as the “common rites” were carried out.⁸ As a comparative piece, this book was especially useful for framing and understanding the state of the conversation surrounding the similarities between the United States and the Roman Republic.

Dean Hammer’s *Roman Political Thought: From Cicero to Augustine* serves as a sweeping examination of the evolution of Roman political thought from the end of the Republic to the late Empire. He explores how legal practices contributed to civic inequality in Rome, highlighting citizenship as a contributing factor. Hammer outlines hierarchy in the Roman Republic, and provides a useful breakdown of Roman factions and voting districts, and the origins of said factions. Hammer further analyzes the time, money, and effort it took to make a name for oneself in Rome when not from a wealthy or established family. This provides significant evidence for the claim that Rome was a heavily meritocratic society. It further suggests that “open” citizenship laws only meant equality under the eyes of the law, *not* necessarily in a social sense.

Lily Ross Taylor’s *Roman Voting Assemblies* examines the Republic’s electoral system over a few centuries, yielding a comprehensive examination into how the voting assemblies were divided, how the tribes were sorted, and the different decisions for which each voting assembly was used for. She provides a thorough look of the electoral system, which was useful for understanding of the demographic information of the different voting assemblies. As Hammer acknowledges, the assemblies represented a disparity in social classes; Taylor provides evidence of how this disparity was translated into the results of elections.

⁸ Lane, *The Birth of Politics*, 247

Finally, Erich Romàn and Jeff Spinner probe into citizenship as a concept over time. They both contend that liberal citizenship, while relatively inclusive, remains exclusive to a few groups. They criticize the tyranny of the majority as detrimental to minorities, as well as ways citizenship can, and should, evolve beyond liberalism into a more inclusive practice. Furthermore, Spinner identifies the idea of *partial citizenship* those who find themselves torn between two cultures and identities may choose to exist in both, to varying extents, so to not give up one identity for another.⁹ Cicero addresses this concept in *De re publica* under the label “double-citizenship,” which I examine later.¹⁰ Romàn’s *Citizenship and Its Exclusions* is invaluable in understanding contemporary citizenship practices, both legal and otherwise, and also provides a first step into collective memory as a facet of citizenship.

While all of these sources have been useful, this project seeks to approach the commonalities as a potential caveat for the United States, as well as to expand on the idea of collective memory and identity as a tool for assimilation *and* discrimination in both the late Roman Republic and United States. While this topic is significantly less evidential than, say, the similarities between the legal practices of both societies, it is still equally important, as it offers insight into what happens when citizenship is dangled as an unattainable goal, or rather, one that would require great sacrifice of self. Cicero touts the importance of regarding all citizens as equal, especially when in a position of power (*De re publica, De officiis*); however, he contradicts himself by also setting requirements for citizenship that are, for the most part, difficult to attain for those outside of the senatorial class. While working through these texts, it is

⁹ Spinner, *The Boundaries of Citizenship*, 171

¹⁰ See page 13 of this text.

crucial to bear in mind that, when pitted against one another, some of these contradictions can, and have had, disastrous results.

Historical Context

A prolific statesman, orator, and thinker, Cicero wrote during some of the most precarious moments in the Roman Republic – indeed, attending to the Republic up until its demise. Born in the wake of the Gracchi brothers and their famed agrarian laws as Tribune of the Plebs, Cicero entered into a scene of social unrest. Among the dramatic episodes of unrest were the Italian Social Wars (91 to 88 BCE). These wars were sparked by the rebellion of the allied territories against Rome, which previously refused to grant citizenship and full rights. Though Rome did re-conquer the territories during the Social Wars, they granted citizenship to those who were not aggressors, in order to prevent another war from occurring. With this strategic decision, the definition of citizenship changed—it was no longer tied to residency in Rome, but rather rooted in an allegiance to the Republic. Though he was an adolescent during the war, the upheaval likely had a profound impact on Cicero’s writings, informing his conception of citizenship, which will be addressed in a later section.¹¹

Shortly following the end of the social wars came the civil war between Gaius Marius and Sulla (88 to 80 BCE), which broke out after Sulla was chosen to act as dictator while Rome rebuilt itself in the aftermath. Marius, a frequent utilizer of *populares* ideals, revolted, and sparked a civil war that spanned several years. Eventually, after the health decline and death of Marius, Sulla regained full power and attention, which in turn represented the sheer power of the senatorial class which he belonged to.¹² As Cicero neared his mid-twenties, this disruption of

¹¹ See “Cicero’s Conception of Citizenship”

¹² Balsdon, “Gaius Marius,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gaius-Marius>.

Roman social life certainly impacted him, possibly contributing to the sense of urgency of his long-standing desire to restore the Republic's original glory.

During his consulship alongside Gaius Antonius Hybrida, Cicero launched his public attack against Cataline, whom he claimed was trying to overthrow him. As consul, Cicero exercised his power to strip Cataline of his citizenship, and then ordered his execution without trial. This was unpopular and led to Cicero's exile in 58 BCE, from which he returned the following year, significantly worn down but steely.

Upon returning, Cicero found it difficult to regain his political status, and often garnered more criticism than support. In the final years leading up to his death, he managed to reclaim his place in the public eye as *princeps senatus* in the wake of the assassination of Julius Caesar. His position gave him the platform to criticize Mark Antony, which ultimately led to his assassination in 43 BCE. As the world around him crumbled, Cicero died fulfilling his core civic responsibility: protecting and preserving the commonwealth.

Bearing this historical context in mind, one may approach Cicero's work cautiously: he was not shy with editorializing, and often wrote and spoke as a rhetorician. It is with this air of caution that one may also identify Cicero's overarching themes that serve as the foundation upon which his conception of citizenship is built.

Political Context

A complex political landscape was unfolding in Cicero's Rome. The tensions that framed his writing likely influenced it, as Cicero himself was not originally of Senatorial class – he, too, was subjected to the results of sociopolitical upheaval throughout his lifetime. There was a “complex system of differentiation” in place, which separated citizens by socioeconomic status;

the hierarchy descended from “senatorial class, the equestrian class, the curial class, the working freemen, and slaves.”¹³ Though there was some social mobility in Rome – after all, Cicero himself worked his way up the *cursus honorum*—there were still limitations.¹⁴ For example, freedmen carried the stigma of being former slaves;¹⁵ women could not own property, and were always at the heed of either their fathers or husbands.¹⁶ In addition to social differentiation among citizens, the actual distribution and ranking of legal citizenship created hierarchies. Citizenship spanned the vast Roman territories in the late Republic, and with this citizenship came rules for membership laxer than any society had yet seen. There were few stipulations for religion, “so long as [citizens] carried out the common rites.”¹⁷ These territories were so expansive that the sheer geographic distance between the settlements and the Campus Martius and Forum, the literal and metaphorical centers of Roman political life, made it difficult for those in rural settings to participate in civic activities. Citizenship was thus granted liberally for protection under the law, not so much for political and civic involvement.¹⁸

Furthermore, voting laws and practices during Cicero’s lifetime were heavily influenced by the social hierarchy, resulting in mutability of the *plebeian* vote – specifically the urban poor. In Rome, as opposed to their contemporary Athens, civic duty and political activity were optional.¹⁹ This led to a different kind of relationship between the citizen and the state – instead of seeking citizenship for office or influence, people often sought it out for legal protections, and

¹³ Romàn, *Citizenship and its Exclusions*, 23

¹⁴ Lane, 267

¹⁵ Atkins, 68-69

¹⁶ Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 227-228

¹⁷ Lane, 247

¹⁸ Rhodes, “Civic Ideology and Citizenship,” 67-69

¹⁹ Zuckert, “Twentieth Century Revivals of Ancient Political Thought,” 544-546

the safety that came with being a Roman citizen.”²⁰ For example, one of the core tenets of Roman citizenship is that one could not be (legally) killed by fellow citizens – it is this law, in fact, that factors into Cicero’s expulsion after the Cataline incident. Because there was no requirement for civic involvement, however, there was also little drive for political action, as political theorist Hannah Arendt has suggested.²¹

In theory, each vote was to carry the same weight: one person, one vote. (It should be noted here that, in Rome, only property-owning men were permitted to vote.) And yet geographical distribution affects this precedent, with the 34 voting blocks in Rome. In Rome, “voting participation was very low,” especially for the poorer citizens, and “substantial financial and social obstacles rendered magistracies and senatorial positions out of reach for the vast majority of the city.”²² The structure of the voting blocks, based on the thirty-four tribes, contributed to this bias, as most of the poor were lumped into the four urban tribes and the wealthy elites constituted the rural tribes.²³ This resulted in a dramatic lack of representation for the plebeians, who reportedly had a “disproportionately smaller vote” than the rest.²⁴ Furthermore, *cives sine suffragio*, or “citizenship without suffrage,” was extended to residents of the conquered territories as a peace offering without complicating the electorate.²⁵ This effectively silenced the voice of many who may have challenged the governing bodies, and even outnumbered those voting in favor of them in elections.

²⁰ Lane 15; Atkins 69

²¹ Zuckert, 542

²² Atkins, 69

²³ Hammer, *Roman Political Thought, from Cicero to Augustine*, 11

²⁴ Hammer, 11

²⁵ Taylor, *Roman Voting Assemblies*, 60

Cicero's Conception of Citizenship

The Roman conception of citizenship was theoretically uncomplicated – it was granted fairly liberally, the rights of citizens were straightforward, and it represented a social status frequently sought by those outside of the Republic. Due to this simplicity, however, the concept of citizenship acted as a canvas onto which members of Roman society were able to paint their own conceptions of citizenship. Cicero is no exception in this regard, and throughout the works examined in this project, he creates a robust conception of citizenship unique among his contemporaries, requiring friendship between citizens, a public life rather than a private one, the total prioritization of the Republic over all things including the self, acknowledging one another with pure equity, and living in the expectation of divine rewards in the afterlife for those who embodied civic virtue. The motivation to be a good citizen, for Cicero, lies within these rewards, both physical and metaphysical.

At the core of Cicero's conception of citizenship lies affection for the commonwealth, upon which all other relationships are founded. While this is not unique, the extent to which he compels his fellow citizens to engage is unmatched. In *De officiis*, he asserts that “our country claims for itself one part of our birth, and our friends another,” hearkening back to an idea presented in Plato's *Letters*, “it is sweet to follow your own interests . . . but none of us is born for himself alone” (*De officiis*, 10). One owes the best parts of themselves to the Republic, and the rest may be reserved for their private life. Citizenship, then, requires a devotion of time and resources to the Republic, because no one may be a “private citizen” (*De re publica*, 48)–according to Cicero, it is a requirement for a good citizen to live a public life.

In Book II of *De legibus*, Cicero explores the possibility of “double citizenship,” which corresponds with the contemporary notion of “dual citizenship.” In this text, his friend Atticus prods him, asking “do you have two fatherlands, or is the one we share the only one?” to which Cicero responds, “Indeed, I believe that . . . all those who come from *municipia* have two fatherlands, one by nature, the other in terms of law” (132). This introduces the dichotomy of motherland/fatherland: the former being where one is born, and therefore “fatherland by nature,” and the latter being the chosen place of residence. He continues to explain that “the [land] from which the name of ‘commonwealth’ and common citizenship derives takes precedence in [their] actions . . .” meaning a Roman immigrant should always place the Republic before their own birthplace. This requires a full discarding of loyalty to their homeland, and, since good citizens must devote themselves wholly to the commonwealth, they effectively become non-citizens, or at the very least bad citizens of their birthlands. In turn, Cicero contradicts his concept of double-citizenship, because he would be unable to call the immigrants’ relationship to their homeland true citizenship. Instead, they may just hold their homeland in their mind fondly, and identify culturally with it – however, legally and socially, they must place the commonwealth before these nostalgic impulses.

In *Pro Archia Poeta*, Cicero defends Archias’ eligibility for citizenship not with legal evidence, but with personal testimony of the poet’s goodwill. The speech provides a laundry list of reasons Archias has more than earned his Roman citizenship, however, most items on this list either consist of the good deeds Cicero did *because* Archias was his tutor, or the names of people who can testify on behalf of the poet. Indeed, one of Cicero’s arguments in favor of Archias is as follows:

“all books are full of examples of voices of philosophers, full of examples of traditions which all would lie in the shadows if the light of literature did not come near them . . . these images always placed before myself in directing the Republic, I shaped my spirit and my mind by the very contemplation of outstanding men.”²⁶

Here, Cicero attempts to win over the crowd by attributing his virtue and knowledge, which greatly benefitted the Republic, to Archias. Because of this, he asserts, Archias is fully worthy of citizenship, and it would be embarrassing to the Republic itself for the Senate to deny that. This ties in with a theme present in *De amicitia* and *De re publica*: those who are well-educated ought to share their education with the masses, so all may be of equal mind and education.

Beyond the public life, Cicero also emphasizes the maintenance of friendship. In *De amicitia*, he pleads, “if you should take the bond of good will out of the universe, no house or city could stand . . . for what house is so strong, or what state so enduring that it cannot be utterly overthrown by animosities and division?”; friendship bonds mankind together and prevents it from crumbling into anarchy. His construction relies heavily upon a sense of community and mutual care, requiring that citizens treat one another as friends. For Cicero, friendship requires virtue, as “virtue cannot attain her highest aims unattended, but only in union and fellowship with one another” (191). Furthermore, his theory of friendship parallels his theory of citizenship and civic duties – therefore, it may be inferred that he believed one’s relationship with the state should, in fact, be a friendship.²⁷ The Republic provides for citizens by protecting them both legally and physically, and gives them a space to organize communities; in return, one must be a good citizen by maintaining their friendship with the Republic to the fullest extent at all times.

²⁶ *Pro Archia Poeta*, 14.1-4

²⁷ A further examination of this inference can be found on page 15.

Cicero also introduces equality as a crucial aspect of friendship – and in turn society – in *De amicitia*, when Cicero’s Laelius insists that “[in friendships] those who are superior should lower themselves, so, in a measure, should they lift up their inferiors” (181). In the context of Rome’s enduring social hierarchies, his plea stands in stark contrast to the widely-accepted idea of differentiation, as it asks the citizen to remove themselves from their pedestal and stand on equal ground with their peers. Furthermore, this conception of friendship and citizenship holds the elite members of society accountable to conduct themselves and those they lead in the way that “philosophers through their teaching can persuade only a few people to do” (*De re publica*, 3). Those receiving an education are responsible for setting an example for the masses, which were not so privileged. Thus, the aristocrat is brought to the level of the freedman or son of a freedman, or someone who was unable to obtain an education.

By clarifying the Ciceronian conception of citizenship throughout *De officiis*, *De re publica*, *De legibus*, *Laelius de amicitia*, and *Pro Archia Poeta*, it becomes an applicable framework to other citizenships, contemporary to the Roman Republic or otherwise. His relatively expansive framework provides appealing ideas to the United States in light of its lack of civic engagement, power relationships between elected and appointed officials and the general populus, and the relationship between citizens themselves. From this point forward, I approach Cicero’s construction of citizenship as a standing definition that is both relevant to and potentially constructive for bolstering what it means to be a citizen in the contemporary United States.

Estrangement from Power

In the wake of the political turmoil ushered in by the Gracchi brothers' reforms, friendship was an idea not so easily defined. Cicero's Laelius recalls in *De amicitia* the actions of Gaius Blossius, who claims that if Tiberius Gracchus had "requested [he] set fire to the capitol," that he would have carried out the task, because he so trusted his friend (149). The narrator then attacks "bad" friendships, or friendships in which citizens are asked by their friend to do "dishonourable things" to the state, and how this sort of blind faith is not actually friendship at all, since it is devoid of goodwill and virtue (147-151). The purpose of this evidence on Laelius' part appears to be two-fold: directly, an example of the detriment to the commonwealth brought by bad friendships, and indirectly, the results of estrangement from the government by the people.

If "of all fellowships, none is more serious, and none dearer, than that of each of us with the republic," as Cicero argues in *De officiis* (23), one may consider that Blossius *was* placing the commonwealth before himself, if he truly believed Tiberius Gracchus had the Republic's best interest in mind—the matter is entirely subjective. If anything, the decision on Laelius' part that Blossius was the one acting malevolently to the commonwealth could have been a symptom of elite Romans attempting to maintain their grip on society, which would be a violation of the concept of friendship. In turn, this is a violation of citizenship. Gracchus and Blossius only serve as one example of the many ways an elitist ruling class can estrange the lower classes from carrying any agency which fosters distrust, and is adverse to the friendship that is allegedly necessary in the commonwealth. There is, as well, a certain irony in Cicero's condemnation of the Gracchi brothers: though he heavily subscribed to the idea that equality fostered positive and necessary relationships between citizens, he does not acknowledge that the famed brothers'

proposed legislature would achieve just that. However, he does mention in Book II of *De officiis* that “political communities and citizenships were constituted especially so that men could hold on to what was theirs” meaning, there is never a justification in the republic for taking and redistributing possessions (93). These contradictions could still be reconciled, though, if Cicero’s argument for friendship is applied: perhaps the desire to be equal to one another would be *so* strong, that it would mitigate one’s desire to accumulate more than his neighbor. If the bonds of friendship in citizenship may ameliorate wealth inequality, perhaps there is a great deal to be learned here.

Cicero warns of the results of estrangement shortly after the example of Tiberius Gracchus and Blossius: “Revolution creeps on imperceptibly at first but once it has acquired momentum, rushes headlong into ruin . . . I seem now to see the people estranged from the Senate and the weightiest affairs of state determined by the caprice of the mob” (153). This occurs when the relationship between the constituents and those in power is unequal and a power struggle. But if there were a true and genuine friendship built between the two, such a struggle would be impossible to materialize – friendship breeds virtue and equity, for Cicero, meaning there would never be estrangement in the first place. Thus, there would be no occasion on which a body of people could be swayed by “the caprice of the mob.” The dangers of estrangement between the ruling class and the wider population are obvious: distrust in government leads to unrest, leads to potential civil war, leads to possible usurpation. Or, it may lead to tyranny at the head of the state, in a desperate attempt to quell unrest. Either way, such distrust could, in Ciceronian terms, be completely avoided by a careful and thorough establishment of friendship and care for mutual good will among citizens. Even Cicero claims that friendship is truthfully the

only thing we can agree on, and “no better thing has been given to man by the immortal gods” (*De amicitia*, 193; 131).

Disenfranchisement and Public Life

In both *De re publica* and *De officiis*, a significant component of Cicero’s conception of citizenship comes from civic devotion via public service. In the beginning of *De re publica*, he reminds the reader that the commonwealth “did not give [them] birth or rearing without expecting something in return from [them],” meaning “[the Republic] has a claim on the largest and best part of [their] minds, talents, and judgements for her own use” (5). Being a good citizen requires complete devotion to the commonwealth, which in turn compensates citizens with protection. He further touts the need for “private citizens” to realize that “in preserving the liberty of citizens, no one is a private person” (*De re publica*, 48). While many statesman—including Cicero—spent their entire lives doing just that, there was, in fact, an opportunity gap between some citizens’ ability to live a public life and the ability of other citizens to serve the Republic.

While one could argue that even a citizen of the merchant or artisan class could abide by this requirement of giving oneself over to the Republic, it still excludes those who held day jobs from achieving political power. As discussed in the Political Context section of this work, the Campus Martius and Forum were the center of Roman political life. For example, if a merchant living in the territories aspired to become a tribune of the plebs, the sheer cost of garnering support from peers and patrons would likely bar the person from being able to run for office. Thus, a significant representation is missing from the Senate. Even the voting blocks, also outlined earlier, make it difficult for citizens of lower socioeconomic status to remain engaged

citizens. The granting of citizenship *sine suffragio* is a further form of oppression cast upon residents of the territories by the central elite, which controlled the vote by eliminating the voice of those who may be the most disappointed.

Disenfranchisement is, of course, not an issue specific to the late Roman Republic – it extends to the contemporary United States, as voters battle strict ID laws and seemingly arbitrary obstacles, just to hold on to the hope that their voice will be heard. A public life is a privilege, and the entry point for public office is far beyond what many are able to achieve, especially economically. And yet, while Cicero presents a hurdle for many people with the necessity for giving oneself over to the commonwealth as deeply as possible, he also presents a solution: this lies in his idea of friendship, which parallels and is an integral part in his definition of citizenship—especially when it comes to treating one another with equal respect and dignity. For Cicero, friendship is built on a foundation of equality.

While the bulk of his understanding of friendship is addressed in *De amicitia*, *De officiis* offers insight into the importance of fellowship for those in office, specifically. “Of all fellowships,” he stresses, “none is more important, and none stronger, than when good men of similar conduct are bound by familiarity”—that is, living together in a commonwealth, a city, a neighborhood, etc. – “[but] of all fellowships none is more serious, and none dearer, than that of each of us with the republic” (23). This sets an immediate standard: we must maintain fellowship with one another, but first and foremost, the Republic. It is then the responsibility of a person in power to “fix their gaze so firmly on what is beneficial to the citizens,” and “care for the whole body of the republic rather than protect one part and neglect the rest” (*De officiis*, 33). He seems to understand the consequences of oversight, as he continues with “by consulting the interest of

some and neglecting others, they bring upon the city the ruinous condition of unrest and strife” (34). Not only is this a complete rejection of the idea of aristocracy, but it also sets a new precedent for those in power: in order to serve the commonwealth, you must serve *all* members, not just a select few. This is an invaluable contribution to the discussion of citizenship, in that it would force someone in power to reevaluate their position of authority, consider the weight the position holds, and ensure that they are, in fact, listening to each and every one of their constituents. If this were abided by today, surely there would be a positive outcome, at least in the way of maintaining goodwill between citizens and their representatives. The equal ground would be firmly established.

From this addition to the Ciceronian conception of citizenship, one can conclude that, if a person is in power, it is his or her responsibility to ensure that the other citizens *aren't* being disenfranchised, by establishing and maintaining fellowship with them. Cicero reiterates in *De amicitia* that a superior is only ever as good as his inferiors, and he should always work to raise them up to his level – this is the responsibility of a friend, and accordingly, a citizen.

Friendship, motivation, and a more robust citizenry

Cicero's emphasis on friendship in his conception of citizenship offers a unique vantage point to scrutinize the contemporary lack of civic engagement, which contributes to the political apathy of a population, ultimately leading to a continuous cycle of dissatisfaction within a state. While a 49.3 percent voter turnout in the 2018 U.S. midterm elections was considered record-breaking, it isn't difficult to imagine that Cicero would be disappointed, and perhaps even frightened, by a sub-50% engagement during an event so pivotal as an election.²⁸ In response to this, one may

²⁸ Stewart, *2018's record-setting voter turnout*

suggest promoting friendship as a way to build relationships not only between citizens and their representatives, but also one another, in order to foster more empathy and concern for the general commonwealth, the ultimate end goal of citizenship.

Cicero is conscious that humans may need more motivation to serve the commonwealth beyond it just being the virtuous thing to do. In *De re publica*, he presents an argument for good citizenship rooted in the divine. In Book 6, the character Scipio recalls a dream in which he realized that “Heaven is for those who have served their fatherland well,” (102). Throughout the entirety of this book, Cicero makes his case for serving the commonwealth by likening it to godliness, describing civic virtue as the “best concern” for the human soul, and claiming that “that way of life,” meaning the life of the virtuous and devoted citizen, “is the way to the heavens” (103; 98). Public life has already been established as a unique privilege to those of senatorial classes; however, the unique aspect of these divine promises is that they do not seem reserved for only the elite.

Cicero’s narrator, Scipio, says there is a “specific place set aside in the sky” for “those who have saved, aided, or increased the fatherland” (97). These deeds (“saved, aided, or increased the fatherland”) are ambiguous, to the end that even a person of low social status may be able to claim that they have participated. Instead of good citizenship being rooted in political participation and living a public life, this presents the opportunity for citizens who have “aided” the fatherland in whatever means possible for them. This could be serving in the military, or farming and contributing to the grainary. What is most unique about the Dream of Scipio is not the motivation rooted in a good afterlife, but rather the equitable nature of this afterlife. If one is inclined to believe in the hereafter, this serves as a compelling reason to serve the

commonwealth to the best of one's ability, even if they do not have the same assets. The divine rewards are all equal, echoing Cicero's emphasis on equality being a necessity for goodwill and friendships, and thus citizenship.

However, even if a citizen is not motivated or enticed by the promise of entry into the heavens, Cicero takes care to emphasize in *De re publica* the benefits of civic virtue in this life, as well. If the spiritual realm is not of interest, one may take comfort in knowing that, by serving the commonwealth, he or she is provided "safe refuge for [their] relaxation and a quiet place to rest" (5). While not of the same magnitude of a promise of eternal happiness, a life free from struggle and uncertainty, which may be provided by the republic, is enough to motivate some who prefer gratification more immediately.

Concluding Thoughts

It would not be illogical to conclude that, in the contemporary United States, citizens are alienated from one another, as well as their government. Politics have become nonsensically polarized, resulting in an inability to see the "other" as a human being, but rather some mythical enemy to be fought against at all costs. Party alignment often takes priority over individual thinking, resulting in a desecration of the bonds of goodwill. In examining his texts, one may extract reasoning for some of the critical failures of the United States – more specifically, a lack of friendship, mutual goodwill, and the absence of equity under the guise of egalitarianism. If this equal ground is not established, from what foundation are we to build the friendships which are crucial not only to exist peacefully among one another, but serve the commonwealth?

From Cicero, we may learn quite a bit from the power of friendship, as it is necessary not only to be a good citizen, but a virtuous one. If someone practiced his or her loyalty to the

country not by anxiously placing all of their faith in a party, but rather placing their faith in the powerful bond between citizens of a commonwealth, perhaps a small step toward greater democracy, morale, and mutual agreement may be achieved. It is through Cicero's construction of citizenship, and its heavy reliance on community and friendship, that we may learn some valuable lessons for maintaining a republic, even in the most precarious of moments. Perhaps it would be useful, especially now, to heed the advice of an individual who witnessed firsthand the collapse of a powerful and unprecedented Republic.

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