

HIST 301
Units 6–9 Assessment
Guide to Responding

1. According to Livy, soon after the foundation of the Republic the Romans faced attacks from hostile neighbors, including the Volsci, Aequi, and Etruscans, in the early 5th century BCE. One could argue that the Romans had to take aggressive military action as a matter of self-defense. Later, Rome had to defend itself against an aggressive expansion-minded Pyrrhus of Epirus in Southern Italy and the Gauls to the north in the 3rd century BCE. The invasion of Italy by Hannibal during the Second Punic War (218–202 BCE), as recounted by Polybius, showed that great powers beyond Italy could threaten Rome, which could explain why Rome went to war against the Antigonids of Macedon (Philip V and Perseus) and the Seleucid King Antiochus III in the 2nd century BCE since the Romans viewed these kingdoms as hostile. In any case, the Romans aggressively expanded their territorial interests, which led to wars. The alliance with Messene in Sicily brought Rome into conflict with Carthage in the First Punic War in 264 BCE, and the alliance with Saguntum in Spain would result in the outbreak of the Second Punic War in 218 BCE. Also, it is clear from the works of Livy and Plutarch that the Roman people delighted in the plunder and wealth despoiled from their enemies after a victorious war, such as at the end of the Second Punic War and the war against Perseus of Macedon. Thus, one could argue that the Romans saw aggressive wars as very lucrative enterprises.
2. The great flaws in the *Principate* as constructed by Augustus was the practice of hereditary succession and the absence of a formal, legal procedure to transfer power from one emperor to the next. Before his death, Augustus arranged for his adopted son and son-in-law Tiberius to be granted the same political and military powers as himself to ensure a smooth transition upon his death. Tiberius proved to be a competent ruler. However, Nero (54–68 CE) and Commodus (180–192 CE) both assumed the throne through hereditary succession and both were inept, mentally imbalanced rulers who terrorized the Senate; the reigns of both emperors ended in their untimely deaths. In cases where an emperor's death was unexpected and no arrangements had been made beforehand for succession, the Roman army assumed the prerogative to choose the next emperor, leading to civil wars between rival candidates. After the military rebellion against Nero and his suicide, four different emperors reigned from 68–69 CE, each with the backing of a different Roman army. After Commodus's assassination, the Praetorian Guard rejected the Senate's choice for the next emperor, Pertinax, and elevated their own candidate.

But Roman armies in the provinces rejected the Praetorian Guard's candidate, resulting in a period of civil war between rival claimants and ending in the victory of Septimius Severus (192–210 CE). The increasing reliance of emperors on the personal loyalty of the army weakened the facade of Republican government over time and, thereby, the legitimacy of the *Principate* as a form of government for the Roman Empire.