

Rome's ancient blood sports, ways of keeping citizens and communities aligned as well as making examples of transgressors through violence and entertainment have been filtered throughout 2,000 years into modern sports and societal functions. Many fans love hockey and soccer, and the tiny amount of blood squandered is enough to get the fans going. Fans love their teams and are willing to bet just about anything on them because they know they'll win. Some societies still rely on public violence to get their point across and keep order, which can be linked to the same way Rome ruled. In this way entertainment and violence have become staples in the inner workings of modern America, Europe, and the Middle East.

Bloodsports is what gets the people going. In Rome executions and ritual killings were a way of keeping the peace and showing the Romans who was boss. The arena was also used to entertain the lower class citizens of Rome, but at the same time uniting them together to uphold societal rules. For those being executed the humiliation one would have felt would be horrible, especially because you are dying for the entertainment of others. Flashing forward through time the medieval period held executions to keep communities stabilized through fear and humiliation. Now a day for the most part society does not kill or execute convicts for the enjoyment of citizens or the degradation for those accused. However, there are sports today that have similarities between Rome's ludi's and munera with some spilt blood mixed in such as hockey, soccer, UFC and horse racing. Although public executions are not as common as they were in Rome, the reasons and benefits behind them have been a productive part of Middle Eastern and Asian communities. Due to ancient Rome's society based partly off violence and entertainment, they become integral parts in the societies of modern America, Europe, and the Middle East function.



Throughout history violent entertainment has played a crucial role in society. Violence was used as both a source of fun and celebration as well as a means for cruelty and despair where many suffered. Thousands would come together to watch different types of violent entertainment that the elite of Rome provided. In today's modern society, there are many forms of violent entertainment but they still have many differences from the Romans. In Roman times, those gatherings were so important to their citizens that it became a part of everyday life. Violent entertainment during Ancient Roman times played a huge role in social structure of society.

In conclusion, Roman entertainment was a very gruesome and violent event. People of the ancient times loved to see gory and bloody battles to the death or watch a slow torturous death. These events were ways the social structure of society was formed and the way the community was able to come together. Nowadays, there are still some things that have never changed. People still love violence in entertainment but to an extent. There are certain types of entertainment that resemble the ancient times and there are definitely some differences. The social structure of the modern day is almost completely opposite of the ancient structure. Lower class Romans are not necessarily the lower class in modern times. While the ancient Roman times and modern times were thousands of years apart, there are still many similarities between the entertainments of both eras.



Although for different reasons, both high and low class citizens enjoyed going to spectacles and games. High class citizens held spectacles and games to show their power and authority. Low class citizens went to the games in order to feel some worth within the society in which they lived. Hazing is a good example of how a common interest can create the same levels of order that existed within the Roman society. Spectacles such as hazing still occur today for the purpose of entertainment and power which was the main purpose Roman spectacles and games were held.

Both high and low class Romans enjoyed watching spectacles and games as a form of entertainment. The higher class citizens used the spectacles as a way to invoke fear onto the citizens. The fear created was a good way to maintain social order in Rome. Lower class citizens enjoyed going to the games out of entertainment as well as out of pride. They also felt more secure knowing that although they may be at the bottom of the social ladder in Rome, they are still above those who are being killed in the arena. Today a similar scenario occurs within groups who haze. Higher members have a sense of power and authority and the lower members have a sense of community with the organization. Roman spectacles held the purpose of entertainment and power and there are still spectacles that occur today for the same purpose.



Violence, gore, and death. These are all things that in modern society are considered “bad” and we tend to shy away from them, criminalizing those who revel in causing these atrocities. These are the people who disrupt society and strike fear in the general population and so they deserve to be locked up, hidden away where they can do no harm. After all, these people are not like us and they are too different for us to understand. But why then do we watch violent horror movies and cannot help but look as we drive by the scene of a gruesome accident? Expressing an interest in topics such as violence, gore, and death is considered taboo and yet each of us seems to have this interest hidden deep inside, peeking out in ways that seem innocent and natural. When viewed this way, those people who do not hide this interest, while still being dangerous, do not seem quite as insane. Likewise, those societies who performed ritualized violence, such as the Ancient Romans, do not appear as different from modern societies either (Fagan, 2011, pp. 49-79). Ancient Roman society was not characterized by random acts of violence but by calculated acts that served both the elite and the masses and therefore slowly became an integral and complex component to society (Kyle, pp. 34-55). The elite used ritualized violence to maintain social order and rankings, while still providing the lower classes with hope for upward mobility, and this tactic is still used in societies today.

There are still people today who see the value of using death and execution as a way to maintain social order among the masses, as well as people who still view it as a form of entertainment. Therefore, modern society has not advanced morally as much as some would like to believe. Although the spectacles of death may not be as widely attended and appreciated as they were in Ancient Roman society, they are still going on. It has been said that “the [gladiatorial] combats were not killed off but rather died off gradually,” (Kyle, p. 55). This was in part because Christians were upset with the ideas represented in the combats, such as resurrection in this world. As Christianity spread, opposition grew and the number and frequency of the combats gradually decreased (Kyle, pp. 34-55). This changing of values, whether due to religion or something unrelated, has led to a decrease in public executions and death spectacles all over the world. There is still a long way to go and these events will only truly end if people can find other ways to satisfy the roles that these events typically filled in society. Is there a

chance of this ever happening or will fear always be the governing force in controlling a population? While most people can learn to follow the rules of a civilization, there will always be the ones that rebel. Is it possible to deal with these rebels in a way that does not involve force while also preventing others from following suit? This is a question that our “modern” society does not seem ready to answer and thus it seems unfair to judge the Romans, who’s society flourished 2,000 years before ours, for not knowing the answer either. Some consider the Romans barbarians for their spectacles of death but did they really have another option at their disposal?

The recent wars in the Middle East have met with resistance but not on a unified front because of the conditioning we have undergone to accept violence and war as a normal occurrence in our everyday lives. The Middle Eastern wars have a striking resemblance to the Eastern European wars fought by the Romans. They are both in distant lands that not many people care much about, they are against a disorganized and weak enemy, we both possessed superior military power but could never fully control the region, and both wars were fueled by the quest to civilize the inhabitants but have other motives such as for wealth and resources. These unchecked expansions of the Roman Empire ultimately lead to the downfall of the Roman Empire as a whole. The modern governments of today, specifically the American government, are very similar to the Roman Empire in the multiple wars, violent acts, and passive and accepting populace. If left unchecked the modern day governments will befall the same fate of the great Roman Empire.

The entertainment of a society is often a reflection on the society itself. This is particularly true in the case of Roman society. Roman entertainment spread across vast arrays of interest from theater, to gladiatorial games, to chariot racing, to animal hunts, and to public executions. The games were brutal spectacles of Roman ideals, the militaristic fervor of the culture spilled over into the arena, specifically into the gladiatorial arena. These games pervaded all aspects of life in ancient Rome. The games served multiple purposes, religiously, politically and socially. I would like to explore how Roman nobility used violent entertainment to desensitize the population of Rome through the evolution of Roman games, as well as the modern equivalents in the following essay.



In our society today, the ancient Romans are characterized as bloodthirsty and brutal due to the savage nature of their entertainment. However, the forms of entertainment in ancient Rome were used for the purpose of maintaining social control, and there is evidence of this phenomenon today. The games were violent at times, but all the forms of entertainment were employed in order to help people with everyday problems in their lives, to lower crime, to demonstrate the power of the nation and the government, and to be a means of social gathering for the masses and aristocracy. In our world today, there are still public executions held in various countries, and people watch violent sports. Today, the executions and sports are used for the same purpose as the entertainment in Rome.

Entertainment in ancient Rome was used for the purpose of maintaining social control, and there is evidence of this phenomenon today. The various forms of entertainment in Rome were used to help people with everyday problems, to lower crime, to be a means of social gathering, and to help demonstrate the power of the nation and the government. In society today, public executions are still held, for the same reasons as the Roman games, and people watch violent sports. To believe that Romans are inherently violent and bloodthirsty is false due to the fact that entertainment has barely changed from the time of the Romans. Today, we still indulge in the same types of spectacles that were once held a couple thousand years ago, and for the same reasons.



In 1988, the North Korean government hosted a public execution. The front row was specifically reserved for children coming from school, children that were witnessing for the first time the cruelty of mortality. They did not choose to attend the event or to watch it from the closest position, but their elite did. The leaders of society decided to place them as closest to the punishment as possible to demonstrate what happens to those that disobey. Fears will maintain those kids forever under the influence of North Korean government, which is exactly what the government wishes to obtain. (Pg. 69 a Catalog of Cruelty). North Korea is not the only one to utilize public executions and blood spectacles to demonstrate their power over others. Medieval Europe, The Inca Empire, The Chinese Dynasties, The Mongolian Empire and even the United States of America have performed public executions and torture for the sole purpose of generating fear and promoting justice. Medieval Europe also used a technique called wheeling to generate more pain and the death and torture to be extended so the public execution was more enjoyable to the public (pg. 54-55 A Catalog of Cruelty) It began where all roads end, Rome; a highly advance technological civilization that relied heavily on blood spectacles for entertainment and justice. The leaders of Ancient Rome developed the traditions of public massacres not only to entertain the masses but to establish a regime based on fear, promote order, justice and the agonizing pleasure of revenge.

An ancient historian called Livy proofs my ideology erroneous. He is the perfect roman; he follows orders and acknowledges the power and determination of the roman army. Livy also speaks about the politics of the city with serenity and wisdom, such as Camillus and how he won the war and stopped the movement from Rome to Veii in fear of the ongoing conflict with the Gaul in 390s BC. When speaking about the sibylline books and the prophecy that stated that to maintain the enemy away, they must make ludi gamed for Apollo, I recognize the tone of admiration and importance that Livy gave to the superstitions of Rome and their commitment to lead Rome in the path of prosperity. In an impressive conclusion, Livy finishes with a simple statement, “The origins of ludi scaenici should be explained along with the origins of other things, it seems to me, so that we may see how from a healthy and normal beginning

they have grown into the insanity that even a wealthy kingdom could hardly tolerate”(Livy Pg. 2-4). In conclusion, Livy truly believes that the healthy roman civilization is perished when the insanity of such malevolent forms of entertainment start to take place, but what he did not realize is that he is one of the few not completely subdued by the elites of his era, and that because of his one opinionated sentence, I still believe that humans are not a crowd of sheep being run over by a barking dog, but an intelligent organism that is capable to think as an individual.

It is slightly ironic that in attending and supporting the games and public executions through the ages, spectators who feel like they are gaining power are actually losing it. They are able to enjoy the rush of adrenaline and excitement that comes from a risky situation without actually being put in danger, much as people do today when they watch frightening or action-filled films. The spectators feel that they have control, over their social standing and over the victims, when in reality it is only the authority figures putting on the shows that have power. The spectators are not being punished, it is true, but they are also not responsible for those who are, and they are not gaining anything concrete from watching the humiliation of the victims. Instead, they are being almost brainwashed by those who are putting on the shows. From a very young age, they are taught not to challenge the social structure and to follow rules. They are shown what will happen if they speak out, and so are more willing to follow authorities, which results in them losing the power to effect change. Similarly, once someone is hazed, they are not likely to stop the cycle. Instead, in an effort to gain back the power they lost and make up for the humiliation they endured, they are more likely to haze the next group of members. The same pattern applies to bullying: when a child is bullied, he is more likely to try to gain control by taking it out on another child by bullying someone else, and so the cycle continues. People will not stop partaking in violent forms of entertainment, because these forms of entertainment are what give powerless people the feeling that they have power in their lives.

Violent spectacles and sports, which have been used throughout history in many different cultures and times, are empowering those who would otherwise feel powerless, which is why they have maintained such sustained popularity through time and are still practiced today. From before Roman times until now, people have enjoyed seeing others suffer for their entertainment because it gives them a sense of reassurance and power. The people who put on the violent sports do so to feel empowered and to demonstrate their strength and authority to the crowd. We see traditions today that continue for the same reasons and mirror the ancient games. Bullies intimidate their victims to gain power over them, and social groups haze their new members in order to demonstrate their authority.



In Ancient Rome the social boundaries of society were upheld through public displays of power, including brutal executions, and were understood to be entertainment. In our society the collective agreement of social norms under the law allow us to feel a similar sense of conformity and pride in our country that the Romans felt. Is this sense of uniformity in Ancient Rome the reason for its lasting success as an empire? I like to think that this idea of collective agreement as a society about laws and social norms allow societies to last. When a society has concrete social norms that are continually upheld by its people does that make it last longer than societies without them?

The violence inherent in Ancient Rome society was used to solidify and confirm the social structure, much like how our justice system, in conjunction with the media, unites our society around social norms. In Ancient Rome, violence in the form of executions, gladiatorial combat, mock wars, and staged animal hunts are widely known, in a historical context, as forms of entertainment. What I want to examine is how these violent displays of power by the Romans strengthened the social order and boundaries of the society, while enhancing the power of the state. Using evidence from early scholars, Livy and Tertullian, as well as more recent authors, Donald Kyle and Garrett Fagan, I will argue how our current social structure relates to that of Ancient Rome's.



Imagine, you walk out the front door of your home in the heart of bustling Rome with your sights set on buying vegetables for that night's dinner, but instead you are greeted with the perfect view of a torturous bloody death of a local criminal. Such a scene was of common occurrence for Roman citizens as public demonstrations of death and sacrifice were routine. The uses of violence and entertainment go hand in hand in providing a foundation for the functionality of ancient Roman society. Dating back to the earliest forms of society in Rome, violent demonstrations were present in sacrificial and religious killings for the gods, typically with an underlying aspect of entertainment for those present. Celebrations and feasts, both before and after gory deaths were commonplace. Public demonstrations of violence were predominately used as a source of entertainment at the centers of Roman communities. Publicized brutality, violence, and death were used to reinforce social order, demonstrate power, consecrate communal pride, unity, and belonging, and act as a form of education. What started as ritualized killing and sacrifices for the gods, transformed to a societal norm of death and violence as a public spectacle of entertainment. Today, a similar element of societal craving for publicized violence and embarrassment within entertainment can be found blatantly in present day media such as television shows, news broadcasting, and social media.

Present day society does not drift so far from Ancient Roman society in regards to our desire to be entertained through second-hand pain, violence, and embarrassment. While one would not personally care to experience such occurrences, we find ourselves being drawn by a peculiar enjoyment and entertainment in witnessing the suffering of others, much like the spectators of a live execution or gladiatorial combat in Ancient Rome. Violence in media today creates a framework for present society as a form of entertainment and knowledge. News broadcasting is dominated by hideous reports of murders, violent crimes, and constant deaths, yet an average of over 80% of Americans tune into a news program daily\*. We find pleasure and intrigue in religiously following the demise or publicized unraveling of celebrities and political figures as they careen from the spotlight in social media realms such as Facebook and Twitter, or gossip magazines and TV programs. As we are not personally affected by a public figures ungraceful fall from popularity or involvement in violence or drug abuse, we take interest, entertainment, even a sense of enjoyment in witnessing their downfall. For

example, actress Amanda Bynes' highest number of twitter followers and Google searches came at the same time as her recent highly publicized encounters with the law, imprisonment, and rehab stint. Some of the most popularly watched television shows on TV include "Dexter", "Law and Order", "Criminal Minds", and "Breaking Bad", all extremely graphic and morbid programs based off of the current popularized culture of violence in America. It would be difficult to argue that society today is completely unlike that of Ancient Roman, for it is evident that both violence and Entertainment function as pillars in present day society much like they acted as frameworks for Ancient Roman society.

The ancient Romans used violence to influence every member of society. This holds true whether we talk about the authorities entertaining the population in order to maintain social tranquility, the spectators using the games to gain a feeling of and unleash built up aggression, or the criminals being taught a lesson by being thrown into the deadly arena. But these influences were not exclusive to the ancient Romans. Societies throughout history used the same tactics of violence to provoke fear in order to maintain social control and reinforce social norms. They also tended to view violence as a form of entertainment, either in the form of sport or execution. This brings us to modern society, where the use of violence in each of its form is interpreted uniquely. This complex relationship can be drawn back to the way the Romans observed the violence they witnessed in their own society, both as a form of entertainment and control.

As legend has it, Rome was built on a foundation of violence. Romulus, the first king of Rome, ascended to the throne by slaying his brother, Remus, and began to build an empire by recruiting criminals who were no longer welcome in their homeland. Romulus and his band of criminals completed their new civilization with the Rape of the Sabines, during which they abducted the Sabine women in order to start families. This groundwork on which the history of Rome began is the reason Tertullian states, "The origin of the games is in shamelessness, in violence, in hate, in a fratricidal founder, in the son of the God of War" (Sec. 5). As a city built on cruelty and bloodshed, Roman civilization had this inevitable violence woven into everyday life and its leaders were able to use the fear it provoked to reinforce social norms for the common citizen. In modern times, the convoluted essence of our relationship with violence can be traced to the basis of Roman society. This relationship affects the way we perceive violence in entertainment differently than common violence, as well as our tendency to use public violence to strengthen social norms.



Although Roman culture is generally perceived as a barbaric culture with an emphasis on what some consider chauvinist value, there is a direct parallel between Roman ways and our society now. In reality, the spectacles put on by the Romans were deeply centered on cultural meanings, had culturally embedded motives, and there were clear-cut spectator motives for attending. What one might see as barbaric ways today, was simply a cultural norm and way of life back then. In many years from now, people might look back on our American society and question the entertainment in our society as we know it today. The truth of the matter is: do Americans have justifications as to the violence behind NFL Football, the death penalty, and American cinema? We will only know the answers to these questions years down the line, but for now, we will stay entertained by the same tackles, gory youtube videos, and American tragedies that we have had in our society for many years.

Rome is known for its dramatic fixation with violence as entertainment, yet its obsession with coupling violence to entertainment should not simply be viewed in historical isolation, for it is an association deeply embedded in American culture today. After drawing parallels between Roman customs with present-day American practices, it is evident that much of the violence in our society has origins in ancient conceptions that we are meant to disapprove of. By comparing gladiatorial battles with NFL football, public executions in the forum, and Roman theatre with American cinema, we find that the two societies have very much in common, though the precise form of each example has been altered to appear less harmful. In reality, very little has changed. This paper will first explore the origin of the relationship between violence and entertainment in Rome and build into a discussion of how this phenomenon manifests itself today in American culture through examining NFL Football, the death penalty and American cinema.



Thorough analysis of the historical accounts provided by Livy, in conjunction with the studies of Fagan and Kyle suggests that violence was primarily an educational tool in Roman society, utilized as a mechanism to maintain and reinforce various social norms. While our modern society might label this “method” of teaching as bizarre and animalistic, closer exploration reveals that while today societal norms themselves may have shifted, their underlying ideologies remain eerily similar and equally prevalent to those of ancient Roman culture.

Although in our modern society today we no longer attend public executions and crowd into arenas to watch prisoners fight to the death, the same ideals that underlined those ancient Roman events thousands of years ago are still prevalent in our society today. For example, violence still plays a fairly significant role in our lives, but the way we engage with such “violence” has changed. We no longer experience it first hand (or at least not as often) as the Romans did, but we still knowingly or unknowingly live in its shadow. The top stories on the news are almost always ones about death; the most popular sports highlights on ESPN or NESN show the hardest hits or athletes being injured. We love the thrill we get from watching scary movies, and we can’t help but look when we drive by the scene of an accident. As a modern, contemporary society, we continue to have an obsession with death.



Throughout the ages, civilizations have devised violent and public ways of punishing criminals or simply creating enjoyment, and we are no different. Just as the terrors of the Coliseum did not arise spontaneously, neither did the spectacles we enjoy today arrive without precedent. Ours is merely the next evolution in a long line of *ludi*.

The scrape and clash of iron on iron punctuates the rumble of the crowd. Under the weight of their armor and the stench of rotting carcasses and fear, two men grind together in battle on the blood-painted sand in the middle of the arena. A flash of metal shears a man's arm from his body, his cries of pain drowned by the roaring mob. Wild animals seethe and scream in their cages as the emperor reclines in his place of honor, placid amidst the chaos below. This is the popular image of Roman games – horrible acts of violence performed for the amusement of the Roman people. For the modern audience, such spectacles instill disgust. We might lament, “What purpose could such barbarism possibly serve?” Others may ask, “How could one of the most advanced classical civilizations stoop to such blood sport?” What we shall find is that the tradition of extreme violence had always been present among the Romans, and that these games were important to the stability of Rome itself.



The violent and often cruel entertainment enjoyed by ancient Romans tends to strike the modern reader as disgusting and barbaric. However, that flinching reaction is a result of very recent (frequently hypocritical) values not necessarily shared by our ancient Roman counterparts. Taken in a historical context, entertainment such as gladiatorial games, mock battles, and public executions played a vital role in maintaining social hierarchy, breeding patriotism, and ultimately making Rome the superpower we read about in history. Modern entertainment, though less extreme, still serves the same purpose today all over the world.

Once a dedicated following is formed, the opportunity for boundless power opens. Roman government indisputably had the power to kill rabble-rousers. “People were burned to death, crucified, exposed to wild beasts, cut down unarmed, or subjected to elaborate execution rituals inspired by motifs drawn from classical mythology” (Fagan 49). But patriots would not want to rouse any rabble anyway. They were part of the strongest state in the known world, and protecting Rome’s status as a whole was vital to protecting the individual’s status. We still nurture patriotism and national pride, empowering our country as a whole.



Whether to empower the government or the people, violence was exploited and made extravagant. The entertainment value of violence has not declined since these ages and is still embraced today, though perhaps not as publically. Over time the method of violent entertainment has morphed; from gladiatorial combat in Rome to wheeling in central Europe to Ultimate Fighting in the United States (Fagan, 54-78). Despite these developments it continues to serve similar purposes; to empower both the institution and the spectators.

Considering the energy of the crowds that surged at public executions in the days of the Romans may feel foreign, but similar excitement over violence is still prevalent today. Throughout the age of the Roman Empire, games and spectacles involving torture and execution were extremely popular. The methods of killing used were extremely gruesome and often elongated to provide a more entertaining show. Violence and entertainment served to empower all classes of Roman society, both the authorities and the lower classes, creating solidarity amongst the population, and inciting fear internationally.