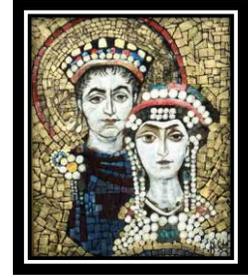


# Justinian and Theodora

*Who was REALLY in charge?*

**BellRinger:** Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow. You MAY write on this paper.



What many previous emperors before had failed to do, "we have decided now to grant to the world, with the help of Almighty God," announced the ambitious Justinian I with his wife, Theodora. Not content to plaster over an empire cracking and peeling with age, he intended to do nothing less than completely remake the Roman Empire—legally, militarily, architecturally—and unite it once more into a glorious kingdom. And in large measure he succeeded.

## Farmer and performer

As a young child, Justinian was sent to live with his childless uncle who was on his way to becoming Emperor Justin I. He was given the best education possible. He later became a member of Justin's inner circle, took a variation of his name, and became Justin's most influential adviser.

When Justinian was crowned in 527, he named as co-emperor his young wife Theodora. She was 15 years his junior and his opposite in nearly every way. She was social, witty, supremely self-confident, and never lost her head in a crisis. He adored her, and she was his most important adviser.

She had come to the crown from the gutter. Her parents were performers, the lowest strata of free society. Her father died when she was a child, and she took to the stage to earn a living. Most actresses were also prostitutes, and whispers to that affect followed her all her life.

When she became a Christian, she gave up her former life for spinning wool. In 522, she met Justinian, who was so enamored with her, he changed the law so that actresses could marry into high society. The following year, he married her.

## Church and state

Justin longed to reunite the former Roman Empire partly because of his philosophy of church and state. "There are two great gifts which God, in his love for man, has granted from on high: the priesthood and the imperial dignity," he wrote. "The first serves divine things, while the latter directs and administers human affairs; both, however, proceed from the same origin and adorn the life of mankind."

If both church and state perform their duties well, a "general harmony will result." It was in pursuit of this general harmony that Justinian enlisted his efforts.

Justinian sent his armies to take Africa back from the weakened Vandals in 533. He concluded a peace treaty with his Persian rivals to the east and conquered one Arabic or Slavic kingdom after another. In 535 he invaded Italy and fought the Goths for 25 years until they had been ejected and the peninsula virtually destroyed. By the end of his reign, Justinian had very nearly restored the boundaries of Roman Empire at its height—but at the cost of an empty treasury.

In 528 Justinian established three imperial law schools and appointed a commission to reorganize the legal system. He created what has become known as the Code of Justinian—the *Corpus Juris Civilis*—part of the authoritative statement of Roman law that was gradually accepted throughout Western Europe.

The Code contained much that was unapologetically Christian. "It is right that those who do not worship God correctly should be deprived of worldly advantage too," said Justinian, so the laws made life difficult for

heretics and unbelievers. He also closed the famous university at Athens, a center of pagan thought, and prosecuted the heretical Montanists.

But to the faithful he was benevolent. He made it easier to free Christian slaves, gave more legal rights to women and children, made divorce harder, and reduced the number of capital crimes.

### **Great builder**

Throughout his 38-year reign, Justinian erected magnificent buildings around the empire—25 basilicas in Constantinople alone, including the Sancta Sophia ("Holy Wisdom"), the crowning jewel of Byzantine architecture.

When Justinian died, the Mediterranean was once again an imperial lake. But the empire was never really united and began dismantling within two years. Nonetheless, the reign of Justinian and Theodora ranks as the greatest in Byzantine history.

*Taken from [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com) (9/20)*

### **After reading, answer these questions:**

1. Describe Justinian's childhood.
2. Describe Theodora's childhood.
3. Identify at least 3 accomplishments of Emperor Justinian's reign.
4. What role did Theodora play in the Byzantine Empire?
5. Who do you think was really in charge of the empire: Justinian or Theodora? Explain your answer.

### **Engineering an Empire: After watching the video, answer these questions:**

1. What does "Nika" mean? How might Justinian have felt when he heard his subjects yelling this at him during the chariot race?
2. How did Justinian initially respond to the violence of the Nika Riots?
3. What was Theodora's role in the Nika riots?
4. What was the outcome of the Nika riots?

**Write:** In the space below, write a **paragraph** that summarizes the leadership of Justinian and Theodora  
(*hint: were they good leaders? Who had the most power? Were they effective?*)