

Abstract (Poster)

During Late Antiquity (14 CE – 500 CE), the Roman Empire experienced an accumulation of debt and poverty among Roman citizens in the third century CE. One effect of this debt accumulation was that many free individuals sold themselves into an indentured state, particularly during the years between 225 – 325 CE. In so doing, they counteracted the “decline” of slavery with a rapidly expanding body of laborers who were technically “free,” but who occupied the social – and eventually the legal – status of slaves. These lower classes lived at a subsistence level or even lower, maintaining an existence that closely resembled that of official slaves. These economic circumstances in effect created a large lower *social* class that worked alongside slaves. Altogether, the social status and distinct identities of the lower classes became increasingly blurry during the late empire.