

Roman Republic to Roman Empire

Start of the Roman Revolution

By the second century B.C., the Senate had become the real governing body of the Roman state. Members of the Senate were usually wealthy landowners, and they remained Senators for life. Rome's government had started out as a Republic in which citizens elected people to represent them. But the Senate was filled with wealthy aristocrats who were not elected. Rome was slowly turning into an aristocracy, and the majority of middle and lower class citizens began to resent it.



Land was usually at the center of class struggles in Rome. The wealthy owned most of the land while the farmers had found themselves unable to compete financially with the wealthy landowners and had lost most of their lands. As a result, many of these small farmers drifted to the cities, especially Rome, forming a large class of landless poor. Changes in the Roman army soon brought even worse problems.

Starting around 100 B.C. the Roman Republic was struggling in several areas. The first was the area of expansion. The territory of Rome was expanding quickly and the republic form of government could not make decisions and create stability for the new territories. The second major struggle was that due to expansion, the Republic was also experiencing problems with collecting taxes from its citizens. The larger area of the growing Roman territory created difficulties with collecting taxes from a larger population. Government officials had to go to each town, this would take several months to reach the whole extent of Roman territory.

In addition, the Roman Republic struggled to have a strong police force. Without police it was difficult to enforce the laws and bring justice to those who committed crimes.

Next, there was also a lot of corruption within the Roman Senate. Many Senators were only focused on gaining more power and not making decisions that were best for the civilization. Many Senators were also taking bribes. Many elections were rigged to support the wealthy, and not the plebeian class.

Lastly, for the next 50 years (82-31 B.C.), Roman history was characterized by civil wars as a number of individuals competed for power. This increased violence in Rome. Three men eventually emerged as victors.

Who is Julius Caesar?

Julius Caesar was a great general and an important leader in ancient Rome. The people were angry that their government had not been able to solve the many problems facing the Republic. Julius Caesar spoke publicly to the people about these problems, and promised to solve them if he could.

The people supported Caesar. The people wanted to see Julius Caesar in a strong position of power so he could solve the problems facing the Republic. As Julius Caesar became more popular with the people, he also became more powerful.

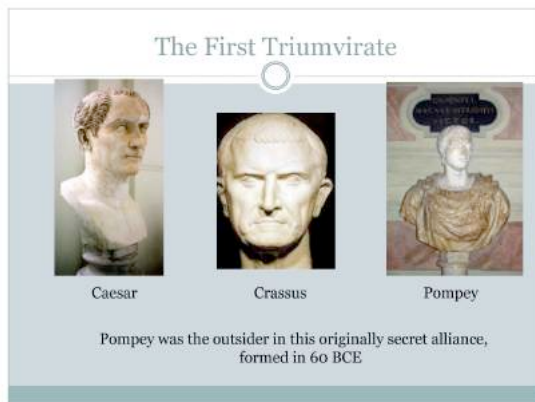
Leaders in the Senate began to worry. They were afraid Julius Caesar might take over the government by force, and rule Rome as a king. After all, Caesar had his own army, one of the

finest, perhaps the finest. The leaders of ancient Rome had vowed that a king would never rule the Roman people again. Their worries were justified. They were right. Julius Caesar did want to take over the government.

One of the laws of the original Twelve Tables was that no general could enter the city with his army. Julius Caesar ignored this law. In 49 BCE, he entered Rome with the Roman Legion, and took over the government. The poor people of Rome, who made up the bulk of the population, were glad. The people called him "father of the homeland". The Senate was furious.

The First Triumvirate

Triumvirate = 3 people ruling with equal power



In 60 B.C., Caesar joined with Marcus Crassus and Gnaeus Pompey to form the First Triumvirate. Crassus was known as the richest man in Rome. Pompey was a general (and also Caesar's son-in-law) who had returned as a military hero from a successful command in Spain. Julius Caesar also had a military command in Spain. The combined wealth and power of these three men was enormous and allowed them to become very powerful. In 60 B.C., Caesar, Crassus and Pompey joined together to form the **First Triumvirate**, or a

government by three people with equal power. Pompey received command of Spain, Crassus was given command of Syria, and Caesar was given command of Gaul (modern-day France).

When Crassus was killed in battle in 53 B.C., however, only two powerful men were left. Leading senators decided that rule by Pompey alone would be to their benefit. They voted for Caesar to lay down his command.

Caesar refused. During his time in Gaul (modern France), his soldiers became loyal to him, not to Rome. He chose to move his army into Italy by illegally crossing the Rubicon River (to this day the phrase "crossing the Rubicon" is used to mean being unable to turn back because when Caesar made the decision to cross his army and attack, he would not be able to take it back).

Caesar marched on Rome, starting a **civil war** between his forces and Pompey's. Caesar chased Pompey into Egypt where Caesar met the beautiful female pharaoh Cleopatra and fell in love with her. Pompey was killed in Egypt in the eventual defeat of his forces. This left Caesar in control of the Roman government. He was officially made dictator in 45 B.C., but his decisions still had to be approved by the Senate. He enacted many reforms and had plans for many more, but in 44 B.C. he was assassinated by a group of Senators who had become afraid of Caesar's power.



The Second Triumvirate

After Caesar's death, a new struggle began. Three men - Octavian (Caesar's heir and grandnephew); Marc Antony, Caesar's ally and assistant; and Marcus Lepidus, who had been a commander of Caesar's cavalry - joined forces to form the Second Triumvirate. Within a few years, however, Lepidus was pushed out of the Triumvirate. The remaining two men divided the Roman world between them. Octavian took the west; Antony took the east.

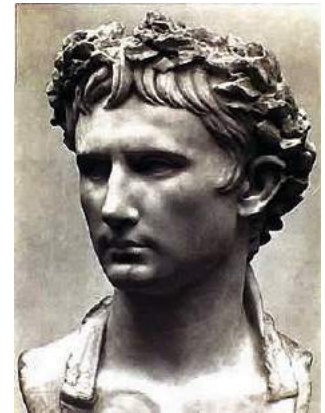


Octavian and Antony soon came into conflict. Antony allied himself with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra VII. Like Caesar before him, Antony had fallen deeply in love with her. To gain power, Octavian had to defeat Antony. At the Battle of Actium in Greece in 31 B.C., Octavian's forces smashed the army and the navy of Antony and Cleopatra. Both fled to Egypt, where they eventually committed suicide together.

Octavian Becomes Emperor

Octavian, at the age of 32, stood as the ruler over the Roman world. The civil wars in Rome had ended. So had Rome's Republican form of government. The period beginning in 31 B.C. and lasting until 14 A.D. came to be known as the Age of Augustus.

In 27 B.C., the Roman Senate granted Octavian the name Augustus, meaning "the exalted or honored." They also gave him the legal power to rule Rome's religious, civil and military affairs. The Senate gave advice to Augustus. The Senate gave him the title imperator, or commander in chief. Imperator gave us the word emperor. Augustus proved to be a very popular ruler, but his continuing control of the army was the chief source of his power.



Rome achieved great glory under Octavian/Augustus. He restored peace after 100 years of civil war; maintained an honest government and a sound currency (money) system; extended the highway system connecting the different parts of Rome, developed an efficient postal service; helped free trade among the provinces; and built many bridges, aqueducts and buildings adorned with beautiful works of art created in the classical style.

The empire expanded under Augustus with his generals subduing Spain, Gaul (now France), Panonia and Dalmatia (now parts of Hungary and Croatia). He added Egypt and most of southwestern Europe up to the Danube River.

Augustus's rise to power initiated the end of self-government in Rome. After his death, the people of the Roman Empire worshipped Augustus as a god. He was a wise ruler, but many of the Roman emperors who came after him were not. Without any limits placed on the emperor's power, the Roman people were at an emperor's mercy.