

## The Collapse of the Republic and the Rise of Caesar

### Growing Inequality and Unrest

In the second century BCE, the Senate had become the real governing body in the Roman Republic. The Senate was controlled by a small group of wealthy aristocrats. These aristocrats were only a small minority of the Roman people, most Romans were farmers. Over time, many of these small farmers lost their lands to these wealthy landowners. They were forced to move to the cities and formed a large class of landless poor. Two brothers, Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus tried to solve this problem. They urged the council of plebs to pass laws that would take back land from the large landowners and give it to the landless poor. Many senators were furious because they were large landowners themselves. A group of senators killed the Gracchus brothers.

1. How did the Gracchus brothers try to help the poor?
2. Why were they killed for it?

### The Collapse of the Republic

For the next fifty years from 82-31 BCE, Rome was torn apart by civil wars. Various men competed for power but only three men were victorious, Crassus, Pompey and Julius Caesar. Crassus was the richest man in Rome and Pompey and Caesar were military heroes. In 60 BCE, these men formed the First Triumvirate. A triumvirate is a government by three people with equal power. Crassus received a command in Spain, Pompey was given Syria and Caesar was given Gaul, present day France.

Crassus was killed in battle in 53 BCE, leaving two men to rule. Some of the senators decided that they wanted only Pompey to rule and they voted for Caesar to give up his command. HE refused and marched his army into Rome. This led to a civil war between Caesar's army and the armies of Pompey and his allies. Pompey was defeated and Caesar took control over Rome. He was officially named dictator in 47 BCE. Caesar helped the people by giving land to the poor. Caesar was considered an abusive ruler by the senators and they assassinated him in 44 BCE.

After Caesar's death there was another struggle for power. Three men combined their power in the Second Triumvirate, Octavian, Marc Antony and Lepidus. Octavian was Caesar's son and heir to the throne, Marc Antony was Caesar's second in command, and Lepidus was commander of Caesar's cavalry. Within a few years Lepidus was removed and only two were left. And Antony and Octavian divided up the Roman Empire; the east went to Marc Antony and the west to Octavian. These men eventually faced a conflict. Octavian versus Marc Antony sided with Cleopatra and Egypt. In 31 BCE Octavian defeated Marc Antony in Greece and Antony and Cleopatra both committed suicide.

1. How did Caesar come to power in Rome?
2. How did Octavian come to power in Rome?

### The Death of Julius Caesar

Some among Rome's privileged saw Caesar as responsible for an end to the republic, and rather than patience, argument and compromise, they opted to return to the politics of violence: assassination. They did not understand that political improvements would need widespread consensus and respect for law and that assassinating Caesar would bring neither. Like most assassins they had little grasp of what would follow their deed.

Some of the conspirators were former followers of Caesar who hoped to advance their careers. Some were from families as distinguished as Caesar's who resented his condescending air of superiority. Toward them and others, Caesar had been acting like a parent: urging the people to get along, caring about all of them and seldom asking for their opinions. The conspiracy to assassinate Caesar was led by Gaius Cassius and Marcus Brutus, both were pardoned by Caesar. Brutus was a senator and a Stoic who by joining the plot inspired other men to join as well.

On the morning of March 15, 44 BCE, Caesar went to the meeting at the Forum to ratify his using the title of king when he was outside of Italy—a title that foreigners would know by name. As he often did, he went out without his bodyguards, but he accompanied by a rugged companion, was of his generals, Marcus Antonius, also known as Marc Antony.

Brutus believed that killing Antony would be a terrible injustice, so another conspirator detained Antony in conversation as Caesar made his way to his seat. It appeared that people were approaching Caesar, as usual to exchange words and ask favors. Alongside a statue of Pompey, someone pulled at Caesar's cloak while someone else stabbed him in the neck. Caesar turned and wrestled with the assailant. As many as sixty others joined in the attack, wounding one another in the fray. Nearby senators looked on with amazement, others were stunned. Caesar saw Brutus with a knife raised and asked him, "You too my son?" Brutus plunged his knife into Caesar. After being stabbed 23 times, Caesar was dead.

1. Why was Caesar assassinated?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What would be some problems the Senate faced after the assassination of Caesar?