

## **IV. Decline and Fall of the Roman Republic**

### A. The Gracchi

1. Tiberius Gracchus and the Problem of Land Distribution (133 BC)
  - a) All the new land that the Romans conquered was administered by provincial governors who were aristocrats chosen by the patrician Senate.
  - b) These officials allowed their fellow patricians to buy up all the new land. Poor landowners would have had much more trouble taking over new land anyways, but were not even given a chance.
  - c) Since the aristocrats used cheap slave labor and produced vast quantities of food, they could always sell their grain for less than small landowners and drive them out of business.
  - d) Tiberius Gracchus, a plebeian tribune, proposed to reform the laws so that these corrupt practices could be stopped.
  - e) He was however, opposed by his fellow tribune Marcus Octavius, who vetoed his proposed laws.
  - f) A stalemate ensued, because a tribune could stop anyone from acting, including another tribune.
  - g) Tiberius, however, would not have it. He convinced the plebeian assembly that a tribune should not be sacrosanct, unless he performed his duty to protect plebeians.
  - h) At Tiberius' urging the plebeians voted to *depose* Marcus Octavius, thus overturning 350 years of tradition concerning the sacredness of the tribunes.
  - i) This allowed Tiberius to have his laws passed, but he realized that the aristocrats would be angry, and might also attack him.
  - j) When his term as tribune was set to expire, Tiberius appeared in the assembly with his bodyguards. He begged the assembly to re-elect him as tribune.
  - k) A heated debate occurred. The Romans, like the Greeks, were suspicious of leaders who wished to stay in positions of power for long periods. The argument turned into a fight, and Tiberius Gracchus and his supporters were killed.
  
2. Gaius Gracchus and the Problem of Citizenship (124 BC)
  - a) Tiberius' brother Gaius believed that the cure for Rome's ills was to take away the monopoly of power enjoyed by the Roman aristocrats of the Senate.
  - b) Gaius did not propose new forms of protection from the government, however. He proposed instead to extend citizenship to everyone in Italy to make Rome more of a democracy.
  - c) The aristocrats, afraid of losing power, attacked Gaius Gracchus.
  - d) The respect for the republican institution of the tribunate had obviously dropped to an all-time low, because a consul actually publicly offered a reward for the murder of Gaius Gracchus.

- e) A brief round of violence erupted in Rome, and thousands of Gaius Gracchus' supporters were killed. He committed suicide rather than be captured and killed.

## B. The Social War (91-88 BC)

1. The people of the Italian cities who had not yet become Roman citizens finally took matters into their own hands. They demanded to be made Roman citizens.
2. When the Romans refused, they seceded, leading to the "Social War" (between those who already had citizenship, and those who didn't).
3. After three years of war, the Romans gave in, eventually granting citizenship to everyone in Italy.
4. Practically, however, this did not mean much. Most people living far from Rome could not make their way to Rome on a regular basis to participate in the government because of the time involved, and the need to stay at home to support themselves.

## C. The Proscriptions of Sulla (81 BC)

### 1. Rivalry of Marius and Sulla

- a) Over the previous decades of the Republic, two military leaders had created reputations above all others.
- b) Gaius Marius, or simply Marius, had led the Roman armies to success against the rebel king of Numidia (in Africa) and against barbarian hordes, known as the Cimbri and the Teutons, trying to invade the empire from Germany.
- c) Among his most important officers was an aristocrat named Lucius Cornelius Sulla, or Sulla for short. Because of his role in these campaigns, Sulla had been elected as consul.
- d) When the Roman empire was attacked by a new Persian empire led by a king named Mithradates, both Marius and Sulla expected the honor of leading Rome's armies against this threat.
- e) Sulla, who had more friends in the patrician Senate, was selected as general by his aristocratic allies.
- f) Marius turned to the plebeian assemblies to see if they would agree to choose him instead.

### 2. Civil War

- a) When the plebeians decided to support Marius, Sulla, who had already taken control of the army, decided to use it to crush his rival.
- b) Sulla marched on Rome and used the army to drive Marius from the city and kill his supporters.

- c) Feeling secure in his power, Sulla went off to Asia Minor to dispense with Mithradates, but in his absence Marius returned to take over the city.
- d) Marius, who by this time was 70 years old, died of old age, so the rivalry was ended, but this did not stop Sulla from returning to Rome to destroy Marius' allies and potential rivals to his power.

### 3. Dictatorship of Sulla

- a) In 81 BC, Sulla was made dictator by the Roman senate.
- b) Sulla then published a list of all the people he believed were his enemies, and thus “enemies of the state.”
- c) The list, known as the “proscriptions of Sulla,” eventually grew to include 4700 names.
- d) All those on the list were murdered according Sulla's orders.