



The Birth of the Roman Empire

READ TO DISCOVER

- 1 What political events during the first century B.C. helped weaken the Roman Republic?
- 2 How did the reign of Caesar serve as a transition between the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire?
- 3 What events and conditions marked the first two centuries of the Roman Empire?

DEFINE

triumvirate

IDENTIFY

the Gracchi
 Gaius Marius
 Lucius Cornelius Sulla
 Julius Caesar
 Gnaeus Pompey
 Cleopatra
 Marc Antony
 Augustus (Octavian)
 Pax Romana
 Julio-Claudian Emperors
 Five Good Emperors

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

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The Main Idea
 Bitter political power struggles within the Roman Republic led to the creation of the Roman Empire.

The Story Continues *As the Roman Republic expanded its borders, its problems increased. One Roman official noted the corruption of the government in a letter to his brother. "Remember that this is Rome," he wrote, "a city made up of many people, in which plots, lies, and all kinds of vices abound."*

A Weakening Republic

By 133 B.C. the Roman Republic faced many problems. Brave leaders attempted reform, but the days of the republic were numbered.

Two brothers, Tiberius and Gaius (GAY-uhs) Gracchus (GRAK-uhs), saw the need for reform. Together the brothers were known as **the Gracchi**. Tiberius was elected tribune in 133 B.C. He was deeply troubled by the fate of the farmer-soldier. Although his suggested land reforms made him popular with the common people, they angered and frightened many senators. A mob of senators and their supporters clubbed Tiberius and hundreds of his followers to death.

Gaius was elected tribune in 123 B.C. and again in 122 B.C. He used public funds to buy grain, which was then sold to the poor at low prices. This and other acts outraged the senators, who sought to cancel some of the laws Gaius had passed. Gaius and many of his supporters were eventually killed in a riot. The deaths of the Gracchi marked a turning point in Roman history. From this point on, violence replaced respect for the law as the primary tool of politics.

The Social War. During this period, Rome's relationship with its allies throughout the Italian Peninsula entered a crisis. Citizens of the Italian cities had served in the Roman army and had endured much hardship in defense of Rome during the Punic Wars. The ruling groups of these cities wanted to share in the benefits of Rome's growing power. Above all, they wanted the right to hold public offices in the Roman government, and they called for Roman citizenship. The Senate, however, sought to maintain its hold on power and stubbornly resisted the allies' demands.

Finally, in 91 B.C., the allies rebelled. The war that followed was called the Social War, from the Latin word *socius*, meaning "ally." Many of the allied cities' troops had served with the legions and were as well trained and disciplined as the Romans themselves. Thus, the war that followed was one of the bloodiest in Rome's history. Ultimately, Rome won. The Senate, however, finally agreed to the allies' calls for citizenship and political participation. With this decision, people throughout Italy began to view themselves as Romans, and the Roman state grew to include all of the peninsula.

Gaius Marius, a Roman general who was elected consul in 107 B.C., brought major changes to the Roman political scene. He created an army of volunteers who were well rewarded with money, newly conquered land, and war loot. As more generals followed suit, troops became more loyal to them than to the government.

In 88 B.C. **Lucius Cornelius Sulla** was elected consul. After his term expired, he wanted to take a military command that promised to gain him great fame and fortune. His enemies in Rome, led by Marius, tried to prevent him from doing so. Sulla responded by marching on Rome, an action that led to civil war. Sulla triumphed, and from 82 B.C. to 79 B.C. he ruled as dictator. Sulla tried to restore power to the Senate, enlarging it by 300 members and giving it complete control over the government. More and more, however, an army commander with loyal troops could force the Senate to do his bidding.

✓ **READING CHECK: Identifying Cause and Effect** In what ways did political events help weaken the Roman Republic?

Caesar in Power

Julius Caesar, a nephew of Marius, was becoming a popular general during this time. Caesar was a powerful public speaker who spent a great deal of money to win support. As a result, Caesar built a huge following among Rome's poor.

The First Triumvirate. In 60 B.C. Caesar joined with two other popular generals, **Gnaeus Pompey** (PAHM·pee) and Licinius Crassus. The three formed a political alliance called the First Triumvirate. **Triumvirate** means "rule of three." With the support of Pompey and Crassus, Caesar became consul in 59 B.C.

Caesar knew he could not win power without a loyal army, so he obtained a special command in Gaul, a region that is now France. During the next 10 years, Caesar brought all of Gaul under Roman rule. Meanwhile, Crassus died in battle in 53 B.C. Pompey was made sole consul in 52 B.C. Jealous of Caesar's rising fame, he ordered Caesar home without his army. Caesar refused to give up his military command and take second place to Pompey. Instead, he marched his army toward Rome in 49 B.C.

On January 10 Caesar led his troops across the Rubicon into Italy. With this act, he declared war on the republic. Pompey and his followers fled to Greece, where Caesar defeated him and then marched into Egypt. He put **Cleopatra**, a daughter of the ruling Ptolemy family, on the throne as a Roman ally. In 46 B.C. Caesar returned triumphant to Rome. Two years later, the Senate declared him dictator for life.

The rule of Caesar. Caesar increased the Senate to 900 members but reduced its power. Many senators, fearing Caesar's ambition and popularity, formed a conspiracy against him. Two were men Caesar considered friends: Gaius Cassius and Marcus Brutus. On March 15—the Ides of March—44 B.C., the conspirators killed Caesar in the Senate. Suetonius, a Roman historian, described the scene.

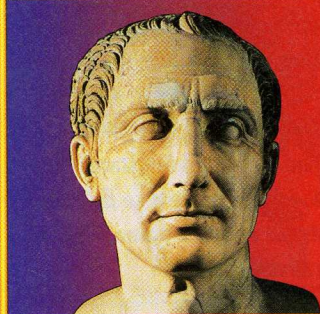


“As soon as Caesar took his seat the conspirators crowded around him. . . . Tillius Cimber came up close, pretending to ask a question. . . . Cimber caught hold of his shoulders. This is violence!” Caesar cried, and at that moment . . . one of the Casca brothers with a sweep of his dagger stabbed him just below the throat. . . . Confronted by a ring of drawn daggers, he drew the top of his gown over his face and did not utter a sound . . . though some say that when he saw Marcus Brutus . . . he reproached him in Greek with: ‘You, too, my child?’”

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Twelve Caesars*

✓ **READING CHECK: Sequencing** What steps did Julius Caesar take to gain and keep power over the Roman Republic?

HISTORY MAKER



Julius Caesar
(100 B.C.–44 B.C.)

One of Caesar's greatest qualities was his willingness to show mercy toward his defeated enemies. True to form, once in power, Caesar forgave Pompey's supporters in the Senate. These men were among those who murdered Caesar.

What If? How might the history of the Roman Republic have been different if Caesar had shown less mercy?



HISTORY MAKER

Augustus (63 B.C.—A.D. 14)

Augustus's funeral followed Roman tradition. His body was burned on a funeral pyre and his ashes were buried with great ceremony. After a senator reported seeing Augustus's spirit rise through the flames, the Senate declared that the Divine Augustus should be made a god of the state. **How does this sculpture demonstrate a new Roman view of a divine ruler?**

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Augustus

After reading more about Caesar and Augustus on the CD-ROM, create political campaign posters comparing the qualities of each man.



The Roman Empire

Caesar had chosen his grandnephew, Octavian, as his heir. A struggle for power, however, broke out after Caesar's death.

The Second Triumvirate. Octavian was 19 years old when Caesar was murdered. **Marc Antony**, a general and an ally of Caesar's, drove out the conspirators and took control in Rome. Then Octavian and Antony—along with Lepidus, Caesar's second-in-command—formed the Second Triumvirate. Marc Antony led an army east, reconquering Syria and Asia Minor from the armies of Brutus and Cassius. Then he joined his ally Cleopatra in Egypt. Meanwhile, Octavian forced Lepidus to retire and built his own power in Italy.

Antony and Octavian divided the Roman world. Antony took the east, and Octavian the west. In time, however, Octavian persuaded the Senate to declare war on Antony and Cleopatra. In 31 B.C., in a naval battle at Actium in Greece, Octavian defeated their fleet. Within a year, Octavian captured Alexandria. Seeing that they could not escape, Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide.

Octavian: the first Augustus. Octavian was determined to avoid Julius Caesar's fate. When the Senate appointed him consul, Octavian did not present himself as king or emperor. Instead, he called himself *princeps*, or "first citizen." In 27 B.C. the Senate gave Octavian the title *Augustus*, or "the revered one." He has been known ever since as Augustus Caesar, or simply **Augustus**.

Although Augustus never used the title *emperor*, historians generally refer to him as the first Roman emperor. This is because beginning with the reign of Augustus, the Roman Republic became the Roman Empire. Augustus began a series of military conquests that greatly expanded the empire's frontiers. Under his rule, the empire stretched from Spain in the west to Syria in the east, and from Egypt and the Sahara in the south to the Rhine and Danube Rivers in the north. Augustus hoped to push the borders of Rome even further. He ordered his legions to drive north of the Rhine River. Roman forces moved into Germany as far as the Elbe River. In A.D. 9, however, German tribes defeated the invaders. The Germans' victory forced Rome to accept the Rhine River as the boundary of its northern frontier.

The reign of Augustus began a period known as the **Pax Romana**, or "Roman Peace." This period of peace would last for more than 200 years. Peace came at a price, however. The political system that Augustus created greatly reduced the traditional powers of the Senate, assemblies, and magistrates. Thus, there was always a threat that an emperor would abuse his power. Over the years, some did.

The Pax Romana emperors. Augustus died in A.D. 14. For the next 54 years, relatives of Julius Caesar, called the **Julio-Claudian Emperors**, ruled the empire. Tiberius, who reigned from A.D. 14 to A.D. 37, was the adopted son of Augustus. Tiberius proved to be an adequate, but disliked, ruler. Caligula, his brutal and insane successor, was murdered in A.D. 41. Claudius, an intelligent man who administered the empire wisely, followed Caligula. During his rule the Roman legions conquered Britain. But even Claudius could not escape the violence that often ended an emperor's reign. It is believed that his wife, Agrippina, poisoned him in A.D. 54. Nero, the last of the Julio-Claudians, also came to an untimely end. Blamed for a disastrous fire that swept Rome, Nero killed himself rather than face certain assassination.

Emperors of the Pax Romana 27 B.C.–A.D. 180

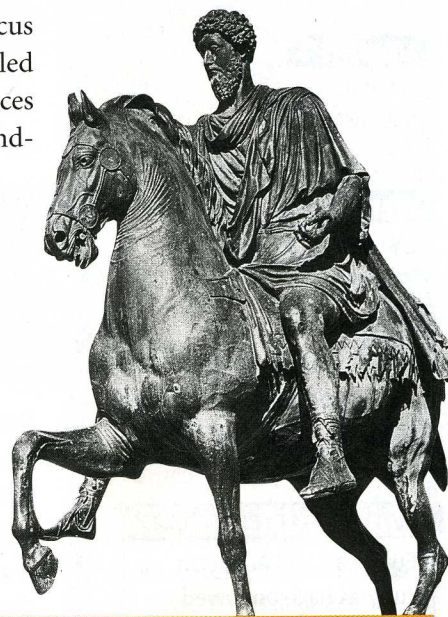
27 B.C.–A.D. 14* Augustus	A.D. 14–A.D. 68 Julio-Claudian Emperors Tiberius (14–37) Caligula (37–41) Claudius (41–54) Nero (54–68)	A.D. 68–A.D. 69 Army Emperors Galba, Otho, Vitellius (Chosen by various legions during a succession crisis)	A.D. 69–A.D. 96 Flavian Emperors Vespasian (69–79) Titus (79–81) Domitian (81–96)	A.D. 96–A.D. 180 The Five Good Emperors Nerva (96–98) Trajan (98–117) Hadrian (117–138) Antoninus Pius (138–161) Marcus Aurelius (161–180)
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*Dates of reign

Because the Romans never developed a rule for selecting a new emperor, many emperors named their successors. The Roman army, however, often refused to accept the new emperors. In A.D. 69 alone, four different emperors ruled Rome.

Vespasian, the last emperor to come to power in A.D. 69, was the first of the Flavian emperors. The Flavians ruled the empire until A.D. 96, when Emperor Nerva came to power. He was the first of a series of rulers known as the **Five Good Emperors**. Together, they ruled Rome for almost 100 years. Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius were among this notable group of Roman emperors. Hadrian, who ruled from A.D. 117 to A.D. 138, was born in Spain. Thus, he understood the provinces and spent a great deal of time trying to Romanize them. To help protect the boundaries of the empire, Hadrian built fortifications along the frontier. In northern Britain, for example, he built Hadrian's Wall, which stretched from sea to sea. Marcus Aurelius, the last of the Good Emperors, began his reign in A.D. 161. He was a well-educated man who preferred studying Stoic philosophy to fighting wars. Nevertheless, he had to defend the empire against invaders from the north and the east. These invaders would play a key role in the future of Rome.

Marcus Aurelius was forced to begin military activity on the frontiers almost immediately after he came to power.



✓ **READING CHECK: Finding the Main Idea** What characterized the first two centuries of the Roman Empire?

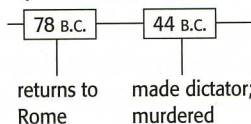
SECTION 3 REVIEW

1. Define and explain the significance: triumvirate

2. Identify and explain the significance:

- the Gracchi
- Gaius Marius
- Lucius Cornelius Sulla
- Julius Caesar
- Gnaeus Pompey
- Cleopatra
- Marc Antony
- Augustus (Octavian)
- Pax Romana
- Julio-Claudian Emperors
- Five Good Emperors

3. Sequencing Make a time line like the one below. Complete it by showing the main events in Julius Caesar's rise to power.



4. Finding the Main Idea

- a. What political changes during the first century B.C. helped lead to the end of the Roman Republic?
- b. In what ways did Julius Caesar's rule mark a shift from a republic to an empire?
- c. Contrast the rule of the Julio-Claudians with the rule of the Five Good Emperors.

5. Writing and Critical Thinking

Identifying a Point of View Explain how the Roman view of power and authority changed from the first century B.C. through the first two centuries of the Roman Empire.

Consider:

- the earlier vow by Romans never to be ruled by a king
- Rome's republican government, with its checks and balances
- the murder of Julius Caesar
- the establishment of the empire



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