

Student Handout 4

As you read this, look for key events that caused the Roman Republic to become an Empire. Underline events you think might be important.

The Fall of the Roman Republic and the Rise of the Empire

In 100 BCE, the people of Rome lived in what was known as the Roman Republic. Although the most important positions in the government were held by wealthy men, these men were elected by mass assemblies of citizens (free Roman men). The assemblies could also vote on laws and important government policies. Roman people were proud they lived in a "Republic" in which many people shared some of the power. While rich Roman men had more power, other Roman men could at least participate in the process.

This system of government eventually fell apart however, and it was replaced by the Roman Empire. The problems of the Republic perhaps began around 133 BCE when a young aristocrat (rich guy!) name Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus was a tribune, an elected official supposed to represent the common people. Gracchus wanted to return some land taken by the government to poor farmers, and instead of asking the Senate (the usual procedure), he presented his idea to a mass assembly of the people. He managed to kick out another tribune who went against him, and he got the bill passed. Not long after though, Gracchus was murdered by a group of angry senators. This conflict between officials weakened the government of the Republic.

Meanwhile, Rome was growing as it fought several wars and conquered different places. Many of the Roman soldiers had been farmers, and when they came home from war they found that their farms had been taken over by wealthy Romans. Conflict over land and the treatment of returning soldiers became an issue too for Rome.

Some years later, Gracchus' brother became a tribune too, and he was also murdered when he proposed big changes to help people with less power and money. Wealthy senators did not want to compromise or give up their land or power.

As Rome gained new land through war, some military leaders gained lots of power and influence too. One Roman military leader, Sulla, took over Rome with his troops in 82 BCE and declared himself "dictator." Sulla ruled for two years and killed many, many people who spoke out against his power. This was a big change from the early days of the republic.

These types of conflicts continued as different military and political leaders competed for power. Two leaders emerged eventually, both of whom had been important generals in Rome's wars: Pompey and Julius Caesar.

Caesar wanted to change the Roman system like Gracchus - giving land and more power to former soldiers. However, Pompey wanted to keep the system the way it was and protect the wealthy. In 49 BCE, a civil war erupted in which Pompey and his supporters fought against Caesar and his supporters. By the end of 48 BCE, Pompey had been defeated and beheaded, and Caesar took power, becoming the first emperor of Rome, even if he did not take that title. Caesar began changing laws and giving away land to former soldiers. In 44 BCE though he too was killed by a group of senators. More conflict followed as the followers of Caesar fought with his killers and their supporters over who should take power. This conflict marked the end of the Roman Republic.

In 31 BCE however, Octavian, Caesar's nephew and adopted son, won an important battle and defeated his opponents. Octavian called himself Caesar Augustus and declared himself emperor of Rome. He ruled for 40 years and established the Roman imperial system that would hold on for the next 400 years. He took control of all Roman territories as well as the entire Roman Army. He also invested a lot of resources in making Rome a more advanced city by building new roads and other things. He died in 14 CE and his stepson Tiberius took power.

Adapted from "Republic To Empire." The Roman Empire In The First Century. PBS. 24 February 2013 <<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/republic.html>>.



In the space above, identify a few key events that led to the change from Republic to Empire in Rome (summarize them from the reading).