

Fall of the roman republic history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When people imagine a great empire, most think of Rome. The Romans had great ideas and plans which would have made any current empire seem tiny. From the great expansion led by masterful tacticians to the immensely advanced government which our government is modeled after today, the Romans had a wonderful future, if not for its many flaws. The early expansions led to the separation of an already teetering social class, the government had many holes which rewarded the wealthy and the greed of nobles and people of power weakened a government which could have been fully polished. The rise of Julius Caesar after the arrangement with Pompey would have been longer lived if the senator's powers weren't relinquished for the "better of the people." All of this and more would eventually lead to the fall of the Roman Republic and later the Roman Empire. There were many factors which led to the fall of the Roman Republic which include the struggle of government fragility, the negative influence of the Gracchi, the First Triumvirate and the dictatorship of Julius Caesar.

To understand how Rome eventually fell, one must begin before the small city-state grew. After the final Roman king was exiled, Rome attempted to build a small, but somewhat effective government described as an oligarchy or ruled by "few" (Asimov 28). As a Republic, the Romans gave power to a leader by electing him into office, similar to what we do today. This official, known as the praetor, was kept in check by another praetor who was in office. Effectively, nothing would happen unless both completely agreed on an issue which better notes their position as consuls. Today in the American government, there are three branches (Executive, Legislative and Judicial) which appear to be efficient enough to properly "check" each other. Like our

executive branch, the Roman consuls were in charge of the military and led them into battle (Asimov 24-25). Similarly to the American Judicial branch, Romans had their own judges called quaestors which overlooked all of the trials. This was the beginning of a suitable system of governing, but the issue was the people who could be elected to hold these positions were of a certain class.

The two main social classes in the early Roman Republic were the patricians and the plebeians, plebs for short. The patrician class consisted of nobles and wealthiest land owners. The plebs were the everyday social class of normal, everyday citizens which included merchants, workers, and the poor. During the beginning of the young government, the only people who could be elected into the leading positions were the patricians. This limitation of power led to a split in the two classes. Essentially, the voice of all was not heard because only the patricians were able make important decisions involving everyday activities and lawmaking. Not only was the situation unfair, but the lack of care for all citizens increased the separation of classes. The example Asimov gives is this:

“ Why should the patrician care? He was well enough off to survive the hard times. And if a plebeian farmer went into debt, the debt laws were so harsh that the plebeian would have to sell himself and his family into slavery to pay off the debt. It would be the patrician landowner to whom he was in debt and for whom he must then slave. (29)

This lack of care forced the plebs to seek alternative way of life. In 494 B. C., a large population of plebs left Rome to create their own government. This

move initiated the patricians to compromise with their overwhelmingly large populations of plebs. This compromise gave the plebs a voice in the government, but was still very limited. The new voice of the plebs were the tribunes. These elected officials only represented other plebeians and could only voice their opinion on public issues. The addition of these new officials added another check to balance Roman government. An example of this was the newly added ability of the tribunes veto an unfair law (Asimov 30).

Although it appeared the Roman nobles attempted to be more fair, the greed and “ loss of power” to the tribunes made internal strife evident. The tribune’s safety became more a large issue after the incident with Coriolanus incident. These and similar events led to the codification of Roman law in 450 B. C. This was an attempt to prevent the patricians in senate from “ bending the law.” Also, it gave the tribunes the ability to defend both themselves from the unfair advantages established by the patricians and their lives. Ten patrician men, called decemvirs, were elected to hold power until the laws were finished. The new laws were written on bronze tablets and were thus called the Twelve Tables which was the foundation of their law (Asimov 32).

Again, the adaptive ability of the Romans resulted in another sensible solution. Whenever a problem arose, they were able to resolve the issue. The question then is why were there so many issues during this era? Even after they moved on to a seemingly better government, the patricians and plebeians arrived at another road block. The decemvirs, according to Roman tradition, stayed in power even after the laws were written. More issues that revolved around the struggle of total control plagued the senate. Again the

<https://assignbuster.com/fall-of-the-roman-republic-history-essay/>

plebeians wanted to leave because of these events, but large portion of the population forced the patricians to listen and the decemvirs relinquished their position. Soon power would be more evenly spread as the plebeians position to better influence lawmaking increased and the integration of the two classes in marriage allowed the less fortunate more opportunities (Asimov 33). With more and more opportunities to become a stable and fair government, Rome was on the right path. Although they took a step ahead in their maturity, there was a significant setback many historians believed contributed to the fall of Republic.

Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, better known as the Gracchi, were two brothers who sought radical reform which many believe increased tension in the senate and weakened power due to a large separation of ideas. Their father was both a politician and military leader, which theoretically gave them the tools to succeed. After his death in Spain Cornelia, the Gracchi's mother, made sure her sons were well-educated citizens before they were fighters. Her dedication to her only “jewels” would craft the foundation of a politically strong, but socially destructive dreamers. The older Gracchi, Tiberius, initiated the path to reform after witnessing the horrors of injustice and social inequality in Rome. In 134 B. C. he was elected as a tribune and his first attempt to bring equality was the idea of a land reform. Essentially, his plan was to make the available land more evened out to all citizens of Rome (Asimov 138-40). Although this was a healthy plan for the plebs, the problem began with the current landowners.

The patricians, both in senate and out, were angered by this notion.

Although there technically was a law which supported Tiberius' reform, the

<https://assignbuster.com/fall-of-the-roman-republic-history-essay/>

wealthy patricians would lose a great portion of their land (Asimov 139). To protect their land, his opponents used their governmental system and monetary strength to gain an advantage. Since no new law would be pass if a veto by the tribune party was raised, their strategy was to buy their way into protection. The other tribune at the time was a man name Marcus Octavius, who was believed to be a friend of Tiberius. After a few bribes from the patricians, Octavius proved to be a friend only to the highest bidder. The use of his power to veto successfully prevented the new reforms to be passed. This caused Tiberius to motion the removal of his former friend and co-tribune. In fact, this unlawful move granted the senate more reasons to remove this radical. His death was imminent after his term so he attempted to have himself reelected illegally. This ended poorly due to his opponents claim of Tiberius's attempt to be a monarch. The Republic would have nothing to do with this again, so Tiberius did not become a tribune again. After he lost his seat in the senate, he was brutally murdered by his opponents and dumped into the Tiber River (Asimov 140-41).

Eventually, Gaius played an important role for the reformers. After his brother's death, he was elected a tribune a