

# Term paper on the causes of the violence which ultimately destroyed the roman rep...

[Economics](#), [Money](#)



The collapse of the Roman Empire has been studied by hundreds if not thousands of scholars over time. Reasons why the fall took place are plentiful; however, the actions of one figure have been studied closely: that of Julius Caesar. Examining the letters and documents of Caesar, Marcus Tullius Cicero, and Sallust will help to answer the question as to why the fall of the Roman Empire occurred and how much Caesar is to blame. However, it will be shown that although Caesar may have quickened the stage for collapse through an upset in the constitutional political system of Rome, the empire's problems had already been in effect for decades prior to Caesar's rule. He was just a man of great ambition, whose life was cut short.

deeper than the ambitions of men like Marius, Sulla and Julius Caesar." 1  
Caesar rose to power quickly within Rome through bribes and appointments. However, it was through the creation of the First Triumvirate that he established control of the Roman Republic, along with Crassus and Pompey. It was the failure of this same Triumvirate that stripped Pompey of power and brought about a civil war that is believed to have accelerated the destruction of the empire.

The Senate demanded, through an alliance with Pompey, that Caesar immediately relinquish control of his troops. This occurred after both Crassus and Caesar's daughter, Pompey's wife, died.

Caesar's next action, a military one, strongly affected the status of the empire. He refused the order and used his loyal mass of troops to march on Rome. Caesar explains below:

Let Pompey go to his own province; let them both disband their armies; let all persons in Italy lay down their arms; let all fears be removed from the city; let free elections, and the whole republic be resigned to the direction of the senate and Roman people. That these things might be the more easily performed, and conditions secured and confirmed by oath, either let Pompey come to Caesar, or allow Caesar to go to him; it might be that all their disputes would be settled by an interview. . . . It was not an equitable proposal, to require that Caesar should quit Ariminum and return to his province. . . . 2

Cicero, on the other hand, was disgusted with Caesar's actions. Believing Caesar wanted power above everything else; he called into question the moral purpose of his actions. " And he says he is doing all this for his honour's sake!. . . . And is it good to have an army without public authority, to seize Roman towns by way of opening the road to the mother city. . . . ' all for the first of deities, Sole power.'" 4

Here, Cicero pondered how Caesar could believe his action of marching on Rome was about personal honor and morality, when it so deeply affected the city and empire. However, to Caesar it was a necessary feat on Rome, showing a softer side with his enemies. He pardoned them from execution. He did not believe in cruelty, creating a new policy of *Clementia* involving mercy and fairness. Caesar explained the concept in a letter to Cicero:

You rightly surmise of me that of all things I abhor cruelty. I am not disturbed by the fact that those whom I have released are said to have left the country

in order to make war against me once more. Nothing pleases me better than that I should be true to my nature and they to theirs. 5

However, the issue of morality mixed with ambition is a powerful one in discussions of the Roman Empire and its collapse. Sallust, a Roman historian, centers on this topic in his *The War on Catiline*. 6 Per Sallust, the decline began with the destruction of Carthage in 146 B. C. E. When Rome's rival was destroyed, it gained unbelievable fortune through open sea and land routes.

Hence the lust for power first, then for money grew upon them; these were, I must say, the root of all evils. For avarice destroyed honor, integrity, and all other noble qualities: taught in its place insolence, cruelty, to neglect the gods. To set a price on everything. Ambition drove many men to become false; to have one thought locked in the breast, another ready on the tongue; to value friendships and enmities not on their merits but by the standard of self-interest, and to show a good front rather than a good heart. 7

Yet, although Sallust is very critical of ambition in the passage above, he was very close friends with Caesar and took his side on most accounts. Caesar obviously had a powerful force of ambition, however, did his march on Rome change the course of history? If Pompey ruled along with the Senate, instead of Caesar, would the empire have never fallen? The answer, more than likely, is no even with the strain on the political system of the Republic and the stretched resources of his imperialistic exploits.

“What made Caesar most openly and mortally hated,” wrote Plutarch, “was his passion to be king.”<sup>8</sup> Caesar wanted power and succeeded in becoming dictator for life, with a continuing wish to become king. Although the evidence is not clear, many argue that Caesar’s dream was to create a monarchy. “One school of thought contends that individual generals and would be dictators like Julius Caesar and Pompey destroyed the traditional political system of Rome through ruthless ambition.”<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, as Sallust said, once the money started rolling in decades previously, corruption had already taken a hold in the Republic. The political system had already changed for the worse since money and scheming were a lasting part of its existence. Caesar just wanted to receive what he deserved, including power over the command of the army, running things his own way, instead of being put aside by the Senate and Pompey.

In addition, the crises also accelerated due to Roman expansionism before Caesar’s time and after. “The Roman Constitution had been designed to govern a city-state. It was well adapted for Italy, but not to governing an overseas empire.”<sup>10</sup> Caesar, of course, was a very successful expansionist. However, he was hardly the only one of Rome’s leaders to be so.

Caesar ruled the Roman Empire for only a few years until his murder on the Ides of March in 44 B. C. E. His adopted heir, Octavius, also known as Caesar Augustus, took over. He did save Rome from crises for a while by ending the civil wars and, as some believe, restored the Republic. He was greatly loved by his countrymen.

In a rundown of his accomplishments, Augustus claimed the financial and expansionists achievements of his life in which there is some truth, which included him using his own money for the government purse. For instance, he established twenty-eight colonies, which continued to be a drain on resources and the economy. After the Roman public gave him the title of “father of the country”, Augustus summarized his accomplishments. In his own words, “I waged many wars throughout the whole world by land and by sea, both civil and foreign, and when victorious I spared all citizens who sought pardon. . . . The dictatorship offered to me. . . by the people and the senate, both in my absence and in my presence, I refused to accept. . . .” 11

Augustus only expanded the imperialistic achievements of Caesar. It is true, he did continue along the lines of Caesar, including a continuation of the dictatorship in spite of his claims above. However, he also brought about peace for a period of time. The Roman Empire did not fall in totality until centuries later. Would have things been really different if Pompey had defeated Caesar?

Pompey was basically a puppet of the Senate and Cicero. His time would have run out quickly as the population waited for another strong soul to arrive and take over. Rome had been anarchic for ages and the place would have reverted back to its old ways eventually. Of course, we do not know this exactly. Theories abound on what caused the collapse of a huge and ruling empire. Only a time machine could tell us.

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