

From Republic to Dictatorship

Inability to Compromise

By the 2nd century B.C., the common people were again **demanding economic and political reforms.**

The aristocracy, controlling the Senate, bitterly **opposed** measures that threatened their wealth and power.

Since **the spirit of compromise of the early Republic was dead**, peaceful reform failed. In a series of civil wars, rival generals battled for supremacy.

The entire conflict, lasting more than 100 years, wrecked the Roman Republic and its many democratic features.

How did this tragedy unfold?

1. The Gracchi Brothers Vainly Seek Peaceful Reform (133-121 B.C.).

First, Tiberius Gracchus and, later, Gaius Gracchus, nobles favoring the common people, were elected **tribunes**.

The Gracchi obtained laws in the people's assembly that would

- a) Recover public lands wrongfully seized by the nobles and
- b) Distribute these lands to landless Romans.

Gaius further proposed to weaken the stronghold of aristocratic power, the Senate. Both brothers were **killed in riots** led by senatorial opponents of reform.

Gracchi Reforms

- **land redistribution** – landowners could own up to a certain amount of land, the excess to be distributed to the landless poor;
- state to pay for military equipment;
- state-subsidized grain;
- death penalty to be imposed on any judge found guilty of accepting a bribe to convict another Roman;

Except for the subsidized grain, the other reforms were overturned.

2. Civil Wars: Marius v. Sulla.

Beginning in 88 B.C. two generals – Marius, the popular leader, and Sulla, the senatorial leader – vied for control of Rome.

Their **clashes killed thousands** of soldiers and civilians.

Sulla prevailed and temporarily restored senatorial power.

3. Civil War: Caesar v. Pompey.

In 60 B.C. three men – **Julius Caesar**, a popular leader; **Pompey**, a famous general; and **Crassus**, a wealthy noble – formed the first Triumvirate.

This **political alliance** enabled the three men to dominate Rome.

Caesar became a general and, through military **victories in Gaul(France)**, won his army's loyalty.

Caesar spread his fame by his book, Commentaries on the Gallic War.

In 49 B.C. the Senate, fearing Caesar's popularity and power, ordered him to disband his army.

Caesar refused and, taking an irrevocable step, **crossed the Rubicon river** and invaded the senatorial portion of Italy. Caesar defeated Pompey's senatorial army and became dictator of Rome.

Julius Caesar

A farsighted leader, Caesar planned to establish stable government, reform provincial rule, provide land for the poor, and beautify the city of Rome.