

the
Roman Republic

Et Tu Brute?



The Beginnings of the Republic

Legend tells of two twin brothers, the sons of Mars, cast from their kingdom by a jealous and fearful king. Rescued by a she-wolf, the boys grew strong and eventually founded the city of Rome along the banks of the Tiber River.

Historians know very little about Rome's true beginnings. After driving the last Etruscan king from the throne, Romans vowed to never again put so much trust in kings. They created a new form of government, a **republic**. In a republic, citizens who have the right to vote select their leaders. The leaders rule in the name of the people.

In the Roman Republic, the most powerful part of the government was the **Senate**. In the beginning, the Senate was made up of 300 upper-class men called **patricians**. Ordinary citizens were called **plebeians**.

Who Holds the Power in the Republic?

The Roman Republic was lead by two men called **Consuls**. The Senate advised the consuls on foreign affairs, laws, and finances. Consuls rarely went against the Senate's advise. Consuls were only in power for one year. Power was split equally among them. Both had to agree before the government could take action. If a consul called **veto**, the matter was no longer up for discussion. Today, we use the word veto to mean the rejection of a bill by the president.

The Romans knew their government might not function if the two consuls disagreed in times of crisis. Therefore, Roman law decreed that a dictator could be appointed to handle an emergency. A **dictator** was an official who had all the powers of a king but could hold office for only six months.

Roman Republic Timeline

509 BCE: Roman Republic is founded.

450 BCE: Laws of the Twelve Tables are adopted.

367 BCE: Plebeians are allowed to be consuls.

265 BCE: Roman conquests around the Mediterranean Sea.

264 BCE: Rome controls all of the Italian Peninsula.

146 BCE: Carthage is finally destroyed.

120 BCE-44 BCE: Breakdown of the Roman Republic.

44 BCE: Caser rules Rome and is assassinated.

27 BCE Octavian becomes the first Roman Emperor.



Above: Remains of the old Roman Forum and Marketplace. This area served as the center of Roman life during ancient times.



Above: The remains of the great Roman Colosseum, where brave gladiators fought for their freedom.

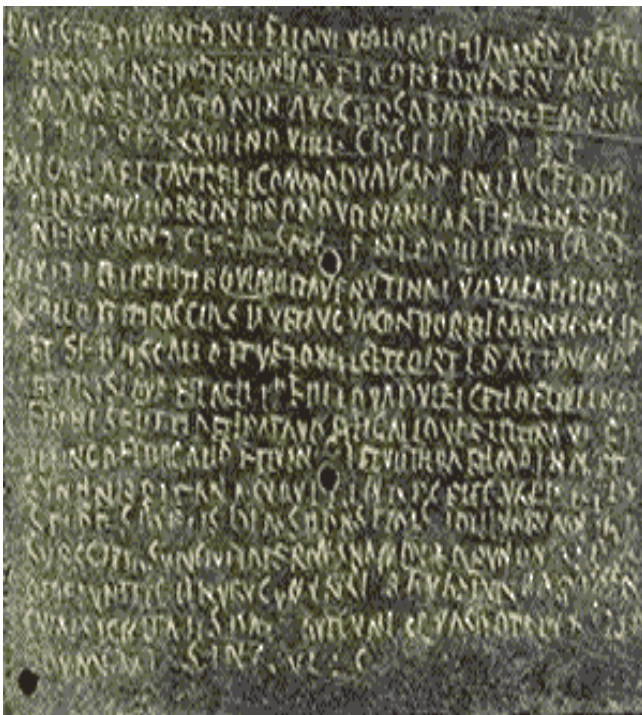
Patricians Versus Plebeians

Through the wars and conquests, the Roman Republic extended its control across Italy. Within 250 years, Rome had conquered most of Italy. The expansion of the republic began to cause tension between Patricians and Plebeians. Patricians and Plebeians had very different attitudes.

Patricians considered themselves leaders. They fought to keep control of the government. Plebeians believed they had a right to be respected and treated fairly. Plebeians did not trust the Patricians to consider their interests. Plebeians often felt the Senate favored themselves. As a result, Plebeians began to form their own groups to protect their interests.

The Patricians grew wealthy from Rome's conquests. Romans would take the riches from the conquered. Using the newly acquired riches, Roman patricians bought land from small farmers and created large farms for themselves. Unfortunately, Plebeians did not farm this land. Slaves brought back from Roman conquests did most of the work. Many Plebeians found themselves without work. The cities, especially Rome, were filled with jobless Plebeians.

Angered by their lack of work and representation in the government, Plebeians refused to fight in the Roman army. As a result, the Patricians gave in to one of the Plebeians demands, the Law of Twelve Tables. This was a written code of laws that everyone in the Roman Republic were required to follow. These laws were displayed in the marketplace for all to see. Even with this victory, Plebeians were not able to gain equal power to the Patricians.



Above: The Law of the Twelve Tables
Right: The remains of the Roman Forum.



The End of the Republic...

Civil War Begins

Even though the Republic ruled over a large area, by 120 BCE, Rome was in trouble. Some Roman leaders attempted to break up their estates to give to the Plebeians. The Patricians fought back killing Plebeian leaders.

Over the next 75 years, several successful and powerful Roman generals gathered their private armies to seize power of Rome. Consuls began to disregard each other's veto power causing Rome to dissolve into a civil war.

Just when it seemed all hope was lost for the Romans, a man named Julius Caesar arose as a strong leader.

Julius Caesar

Caesar was a smart leader; eager for power. From 58 BCE to 51 BCE, he led his army in conquering Gaul (modern day France). He killed, enslaved, and uprooted millions of Gauls. He was also able to capture large quantities of gold. His strong leadership won him the loyalty of his men. They would have followed him anywhere—even back to Rome to seize power from the Senate.

With the help of Marcus Crassus and Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey the Great), Caesar forms the **First Triumvirate**. This alliance helped Caesar gain control and declare himself “dictator for life.”



Above: A statue of Julius Caesar.

The Death of a Dictator

For four years, Caesar slowly took over important public offices. In 45 BCE, he became the sole consul and in 44 BCE he became dictator for life. Caesar attempted to reform the government but many senators viewed Caesar as a king. They hated his ideas.

On March 15th, 44 BCE, Caesar attended a Senate meeting. His wife had urged him not to attend, fearing his life was in danger. But Caser insisted. At the meeting several senators gathered around Caesar. Suddenly they drew their knives and began to stab him. It is rumored that he was stabbed anywhere from 23-34 times. Caesar had been a great leader, but Romans felt her rose to power too quickly. His death sent Rome into another civil war.

