

Political Violence in the Late Roman Republic

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EPIGRAPH

Nihil esse rem publicam, appellationem modo sine corpore ac specie

(The Republic is nothing, a mere title without body or form)

Suetonius, *The Life of Julius Caesar* 77.1

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ABSTRACT

This thesis tackles the role of political violence in the Late Roman Republic. It begins with a discussion over the careers of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, with an emphasis on the social issue of land redistribution. The focus is on the failure of traditional institutions to pass legislation, and how violence was first employed by Tiberius Gracchus as a last resort response to this crisis. Assassination on the part of Nasica was also the most effective means to overcome the power Tiberius had gained from his own violent tactics. The further instrumentalization and escalation of violence occurred with Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia. These three perfected the implementation of mob violence to further political ambitions and also started the process of beginning the legislative process with violence at the ready. This transferred political violence from an emergency response to a standard means of political expression. The trio also developed an alliance which overpowered the republic's government. From here, the thesis moves to discuss the Social War. The particular point of interest is the juxtaposition between failed decades of nonviolent political reform, and the efficacy of a violent uprising. Furthermore, the Social War sheds light on the potency of political violence once it is intermingled with the mechanisms of war. Sulla is emblematic of the perfection of political violence's techniques in the Roman Republic. Sulla fully brought civil war to Rome, slaughtered all opposition, and reforged the Roman Republic to fit his ideal image. With Sulla come the creation of the Proscriptions. The power of unleashed political violence was on full display for all Romans to see. The next five decades would see repeats of these forms of violence until the Roman citizens chose to shed its violent, republican government in favor of autocracy. These conflicts demonstrate the struggle between Rome's city-state government, and the burdens of empire. No longer could the

institutions of Republican Rome, designed specifically to manage a city-state, handle the radical shifts in power brought upon by the Imperial Republic. Political violence managed the demands of Rome's empire and provided solutions to the failures of the republican government.

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Introduction

On January 6th, 2021, a mob of American citizens violently stormed the United States Capitol in an attempt to halt the certification of the 2020 election. The live recap of the event includes protestors forcing themselves through police barricades, pipe bombs being found at the Republican National Committee and Democratic National Committee headquarters, the Capitol building itself going into lockdown, and the Senate chamber being raided by the rioters.¹ The politicians fled for their safety, condemnation of the violence was issued by the RNC, and one protester was killed in the riot.² This unprecedented action shocked the nation to its core with many wondering what this means for the stability of the American republic. While we are still wrestling through the ramifications of January 6th, we can look to the past to understand the full danger of political violence in a republican system.

First, it is important to try and establish the phenomenon of political violence. This is tricky because violence is inherently difficult to adequately define. The *Cambridge World History of Violence* states, “Violence is multifaceted, and it is highly ambivalent. It is multifaceted because there are so many different forms violence can take. It is ambivalent in the ways it can be experienced, socially sanctioned and culturally transmitted.”³ Political violence may be directed by an individual, but it is generally executed by way of three

¹ Kat Lonsdorf, Courtney Dorning, Amy Isackson, Mary Louise Kelly, Ailsa Chang, “A timeline of how the Jan. 6 attack unfolded — including who said what and when,” *NPR*, January 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/05/1069977469/a-timeline-of-how-the-jan-6-attack-unfolded-including-who-said-what-and-when>

² Lonsdorf, “A timeline of how the Jan. 6 attack unfolded.”

³ Philip Dwyer and Joy Damousi, “What is Violence,” *The Cambridge World History of Violence: Volume 1, The Prehistoric and Ancient Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 4.

potential avenues: mobs, gangs, and armies. Furthermore, it would be erroneous to categorize all these forms of violence as equally destabilizing in their nature.

The definition of violence changes over time and between cultures.⁴ The labelling of the events of January 6th as an act of political violence sheds light on the specific nature of America's definition for this word.⁵ Political violence today can be described as the attempt to achieve a specific civic or public goal via the employment of illegal force or threats of such force. The rioters of January 6th may not have employed such explicitly violent actions, but the copious utilizations of violent threats and force to storm the Capitol building confirms it as an act of political violence.

In order to understand the full danger of political violence in a republican system, it is necessary to explore its development in a government which was seemingly torn apart by it. The fall of the Roman Republic serves as an excellent study of this phenomenon, especially in the standardization, instrumentalization, and escalation of political violence preceding the state's collapse. The Imperial Roman Republic suffered under various implementations of political violence in the form of spontaneous assassination mobs, organized gangs forcing through legislation, and even professionalized armies settling political disputes via civil war.

Additionally, political violence in the Roman Republic existed on a spectrum with great variations in its power and danger. On one side of this spectrum was the symbolic violence witnessed throughout the Republic's history. The most famous examples of this would entail the mistreatment of lictors and the smashing of their fasces (traditional symbols

⁴ Dwyer, *The Cambridge World History of Violence*, 4.

⁵ Lonsdorf, *A timeline of how the Jan. 6 attack unfolded*.

of authority).⁶ These actions were meant to convey political discontent, but did not directly endanger the safety of the Republic nor its citizens. On the other end of the spectrum were Sulla's proscriptions, which were the most radical expression of political violence the city of Rome would bear witness to. The proscriptions institutionalized political violence, implicated the citizenry in its carnage, and resulted in the total liquidation of Sulla's opposition. These two extremes display the broad range of political violence, and how it widely varies with its purpose, modality, and scope.

This thesis will therefore explore the function of political violence in the Late Roman Republic, and its role as a successful answer to failed republicanism. Political violence was the tool by which the Imperial Republic saw its most contentious legislative issues resolved, the extremes of political ambitions fulfilled, and the fiery rivalries between politicians settled. In examining these facets of violence, we may implement the lessons of Rome to avoid charging headlong into a similar, bloodstained fate.

Compromise and Failure in the Roman Republic

The Republic of Rome was famously founded in 509 BCE after an act of violence by the king's son against Lucretia, but the newly created state avoided major internal bloodshed for the next few centuries. This is fairly notable considering that the early days of the Roman Republic oversaw a social upheaval which entirely changed the functionality of the city-state's government. The crisis came to be known as The Conflict of the Orders, and began, according to tradition, "in 494 [BCE], when a large number of the poor, oppressed by debt and arbitrary treatment, withdrew from the city *en masse* and occupied the Sacred Mount...

⁶ Livy, *The History of Rome: Books 1-5* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 2.29.

Here they created their own organization, which was like an alternative state.”⁷ This struggle between the plebeian poor and the entrenched aristocrats threatened to rupture the new republic apart via internal violence or lack of defense in a foreign war.⁸

Yet instead of destruction and collapse, the intolerable conditions which led to a political standoff and the plebeians’ radical secession from Rome forced a compromise. The specific nature of the city-state provided the means for a fairly peaceful solution to Rome’s contentious social climate. The result of this tension was the creation of a plebeian segment of government through their own assembly and magistrates known as the Tribune. This compromise drastically changed the function of the Roman Republic, for it now had an institution directly tied to the protection of its non-aristocratic citizens.

The Conflict of the Orders continued on through to the mid-third century BCE, but now with the tribunes employing tactics ranging from more secessions of the plebs to the Sacred Mount, to having them refuse to be enrolled in the army. The result of this was a series of political reforms which continued to shift the Roman Republic to better fit the needs of its citizens via forced compromise. In these political squabbles, the actions of the Tribune often functioned as the tool by which some form of compromise was made necessary for the state’s continued functionality. The arsenal of the Tribune (the veto, the encouragement for secession, the suspension of public business) were all centered around halting Rome until some side gave into compromise. Rome essentially existed in a state of

⁷ T. J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars* (London: Routledge, 1995), 256.

⁸ Livy, *The History of Rome: Books 1-5* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 1.32.

ritualized tensions and forced compromise which led to its many changes over its beginning few hundred years.

When describing the early and middle Roman Republic, Machiavelli focused on the specific nature of plebian-aristocratic conflict. In doing this, Machiavelli describes how:

From the Tarquins to the Gracchi, which was more than three hundred years, the tumults of Rome rarely engendered exile and very rarely blood. Neither can these tumults, therefore, be judged harmful nor a republic divided that in so much time sent no more than eight or ten citizens into exile because of its differences, and killed very few of them, and condemned not many more to fines of money.⁹

The genius of the Tribunate's institutionalization rested with its capacity to channel the needs of the Republic's citizens in a way which promoted the ideals of republicanism. When restricted to being a city-state or local power, the balance of power in Rome proved adequate in maintaining aristocratic privileges, ensuring plebeian protections, and providing avenues for political ambitions. On the topic of the tumults themselves, Machiavelli claims that "if the tumults were the cause of the creation of the tribunes, they deserve highest praise; for besides giving popular administration its part, they were constituted as a guard of Roman freedom."¹⁰ These methods, involving "people crying out against the Senate, the Senate against the people, running tumultuously through the streets, closing shops, the whole plebs leaving Rome... refus[ing] their names to go to war" were the quintessential republican function according to Machiavelli.¹¹ These methods, while radical, kept the Republic in a

⁹ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy: Translated by Harvey C Mainsfield and Nathan Tarcov* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16.

¹⁰ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 17.

¹¹ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 16.

state of perpetual reform and fostered a spirit of republicanism and compromise among the various orders.

Machiavelli attempted to justify the struggles of the Republic based upon its overall nonviolent nature; however, even Machiavelli – the champion of Roman Republicanism – was forced admit that political violence played a role in several crises of the Early and Middle Republic. An interesting study of this violence comes from the murders of Spurius Maelius and Spurius Cassius. These murders were the result of failures in republican systems of peaceful conflict resolution, with violence serving as the emergency solution to such a crisis.¹² These murders were also hailed as a justifiable response against a threat of tyranny that the Republic had failed to adequately prevent.¹³ From the Roman Republic's beginning, the utility of violence as an alternative when republicanism failed was both known and practiced on select occasions. Machiavelli sought to diminish the existence of political violence in this period by emphasizing its infrequent nature, but he is unable to deny the contribution of violence as an emergency solution to social crisis.

Furthermore, it bears keeping in mind that the recordings of political violence in early Rome are mostly from authors living in the violent Late Republic who altered these earlier stories to find more cohesion with the politics of the Imperial Republic.¹⁴ In fact, Andrew William Lintott argues that later generations of Romans shifted these stories over time for the purpose of serving as more apt and fitting moral examples.¹⁵ In other words, the real violence

¹² Livy, *The History of Rome*, 2.41, 4.13.

¹³ Livy, *The History of Rome*, 2.41, 4.13.

¹⁴ A. W. Lintott, *Violence in Republican Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 55.

¹⁵ Lintott, *Violence in Republican Rome*, 55.

that may have existed in the earlier period was toned down by these later writers in order to provide a foil for their reality in the Imperial Republic.

Nevertheless, even if political violence did exist as an emergency measure to employ when everything failed, ultimately, the institutions of the Roman Republic were generally able to succeed in forcing some compromise. This made violence not as necessary as it would prove to be in the later Imperial Republic. Essentially, political violence was a feature of the Republic's earlier days, but it lacked the transformative aspect which was present in the violence of the Late Roman Republic.

Of course, the later employment of political violence was facilitated by several preconditions already present from the Early Republic. These factors did not directly cause incidents of violence, but they increased Rome's susceptibility to the instrumentalization of political violence.

The first of these preconditions was Rome's complete lack of a police force. The city of Rome relied on its *mos* – a combination of norms, customs, and morals – as a means of maintaining order among its citizens and institutions.¹⁶ Rome's chief countermeasure to political violence was its overall taboo nature. This reliance on civic virtue and norms left Rome with little recourse once violence was employed.

The second precondition was the nature of Rome's mass urban politics. Legislative voting and elections were public affairs where all political action became centered in a single space. This space lent itself well to mob violence due to the sheer amount of politically involved citizens gathered in a space to discuss or vote on contentious issues. Because of

¹⁶ Henrik Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 142.

this, the utilization of violence in such a political space possessed the capacity to forcibly remove legislative opposition, disrupt elections, and even assassinate rivals. The practice of mass urban politics gave the wielders of political violence an ideal space to force their agenda.

The third precondition was the inherent militarization of Roman politics. Rome, from its founding, was heavily tied to the mechanisms of warfare. Consistent external periods of peace for Rome were considered rare, with Livy going as far to suggest that the city only experienced two brief periods of sustained peace from 753-17 BCE.¹⁷ Furthermore, the original voting classifications of Rome, the *Comitia Centuriata*, had citizens divided based upon how they would equip themselves for war.¹⁸ Rome's politics were intrinsically linked with the institution of war. This meant that as violence bled into Roman politics, such violence would eventually tie itself to Rome's military functions.

With this stage set, the practice of political violence first embedded itself into the core of Roman functionality in the wake of Rome's ascendancy to Empire in 146 BCE. It is difficult to understate the shock, both internal and foreign, the creation of empire had on Rome and the Mediterranean. Polybius, a Greek historian contemporary to the rise of the Imperial Republic, asserts at the beginning of his work, *The Histories*, that "there can surely be nobody so petty or so apathetic in his outlook that he has no desire to discover by what means and under what system of government the Roman succeeded in less than fifty-three years in bringing under their rule almost the whole of the uninhabited world, an achievement which is without parallel in human history."¹⁹ Rome went from a regional Italian power, to

¹⁷ Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.19.

¹⁸ Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.43.

¹⁹ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire* (London: The Penguin Group, 1979), I.1.

the most dominant force in the Mediterranean. With this came provinces to manage, a mass influx of new people to govern, drawn out wars across far-flung borders, new opportunities for wealth and exploitation, and much social upheaval. Rome had transformed from a republic designed to run a city-state to now oversee an increasingly large Mediterranean empire. This is where the term Imperial Republic comes into use, as Rome was still a Republic in its city, but its provincial structure was imperial in nature.

Unfortunately, Rome's city-state government was unable to handle the burdens of empire through traditional means of forced compromise. Instead, political violence in the Late Roman Republic began as an emergency action in direct response to the threat of perpetual gridlock over pressing social issues. This radical expression led to a power imbalance with the wielders of violence greatly overpowering their adversaries. This was resolved with an equally violent display of reaction.

From 133-81 BCE, political violence would grow to become the dominant instrument of conflict resolution. This is because violence had greater efficacy than any means of conflict resolution found in the traditional systems of the Roman Republic. Violence was a powerful tool which could be utilized for legislation, social change, furthering political agendas, and even liquidating rivalries. Furthermore, the only action potent enough to overcome an act of political violence was a greater application of counterviolence. These reasons caused the gradual expansion of violence in its scope and scale, shifted its employment from exclusive to dire circumstances to a primary tactic when dealing with issues of agrarian or social reform, and even allowed for its legalization and codification once the institution reached its peak form under Sulla.

Structure of this Thesis

This thesis will examine the rise and eventual institutionalization of violence in the Roman Republic from 133 BCE to 81 BCE. Chapter One focuses on the beginnings of political violence in the Imperial Republic. The issue of land redistribution led by Tiberius Gracchus serves as an excellent study into how institutional failure drives the necessity for action outside the standard constraints of republicanism. Not only do the Gracchi demonstrate the beginnings of political violence as an essential instrument of the Imperial Republic, but their assassins also reveal the reactionary capacity of violence. Chapter Two discusses how violence became the premier measure of carrying legislation, with a focus on the careers of Gaius Marius, Gaius Glaucia, and Lucius Saturninus. These three also master the employment of gangs for violent ends and discover how to effectively control the Republic via a violent alliance. Chapter Three focuses on the buildup and implications of the Social War from 91-87 BCE. The prelude to war highlights the inadequacies of the Republic's institutions of legislation, while the war displays the dangerous efficacy found in mingling the mechanisms of war with political violence. Chapter Four examines the full realization of political violence through the introduction of civil war into the Roman Republic. Here, the results of violence in the Roman government shall be analyzed with a focus on its power, horror, and necessity.

This analysis is important because it places the focus on reframing the Imperial Republic as a government sustained by the increasing deployment and later institutionalization of political violence. This thesis focuses on the actions of individual politicians, but centers the discussion on the institutional failure and social pressures necessitating their implementations of violence. The emphasis is placed on how a city-state republic transformed to meet the demands of empire, and how this was deemed possible

chiefly via the avenue of political violence. The centerpiece of this thesis involves how political violence takes shape, embeds itself into the Roman government, becomes legitimized, and then transforms into the means by which the Imperial Republic functions. The uniqueness of this thesis lies in how it combines individual action with the demands of empire specifically to understand the various roles of political violence in a failing republic. It is an analysis on the forces of empire, Rome's violent adaptation to its new reality, and the individual actions which shaped the functions of the Imperial Republic.

Polybius

Of particular interest to this thesis is the concluding chapter of Polybius' analysis on the Roman government. In this section of his work, Polybius attributes much of Rome's success to its institutional supremacy and praises its conception of separated powers and checks and balances among aristocracy, democracy, and monarchy.²⁰ Polybius claims that due to "the powers" which the consuls, Senate, and people "possess to help or to harm the others," the Roman Republic is "a union which is strong enough to withstand all emergencies," and "it is impossible to find a better constitution than this."²¹

Polybius' analysis is not without its glaring faults. His attempt to graft Greek political philosophy onto Roman institutions may have been sufficient in explaining how Rome functioned to his Greek readers, but it critically fails to accurately represent the many facets of Rome's complex government.²² A key issue with Polybius' analysis is the fact that many Roman institutions of governance were created along socio-economic lines of division, rather

²⁰ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.11.

²¹ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.18.

²² For more on this, read "Polybius and the Roman Political System" section of Henrik Mouritsen's *Politics in the Roman Republic*.

than the cleaner divisions of democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy. This ranges from wealth requirements in the aristocratic senate to the various degrees of property qualifications found throughout Rome's assemblies. It is more accurate to describe the Roman Republic as a government which separated its powers between its social classes, while simultaneously operating on a system of ritualistic precedence and institutionalized social upheaval.

While the balance of power was not so perfectly divided between the citizenry of Rome, the Polybian ideal of republicanism with checks and balances still carries weight. Such ideals are found in the separation of powers in the United States Constitution, where power is not only divided among various branches of the federal government, but also among the state governments.²³ Without any doubt, the spirit of Polybius' claim on the superiority of a republic, with separated powers, multiple forms of magisterial representation, and combined elements of governance, most certainly is also found in the core identity of the American Republic.

Even with this praise, Polybius still asserted that the Roman Republic would fall, with the conclusion that it would be from "internal evolution" rather than external threat.²⁴ As Rome was the very first republic in existence, Polybius had no precedent to examine as part of his theory. How a republic would collapse from the inside was a question for which history had yet to offer an example for examination. With this said, Polybius' republic degradation prophecy is perhaps even more important to America today than Rome. This is because, while Rome was not necessarily a clean system of checks and balances,

²³ The best example of this is found in the 10th amendment which declares: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

²⁴ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.57.

republicanism, and a mixed constitution combining tenants of single rule, democratic rule, and aristocratic rule, America most certainly was founded along these tenants.

This is what ties Polybius' analysis so closely to modernity, for the ideas he first espoused were the bedrock upon which the system of republicanism has rested. Because America was structured upon philosophy akin to Polybius' theory, it is quintessential to examine just how he believed such a system would fall to violence. This thesis is essentially also operating with the great advantage of an example of a longstanding fallen republic to analyze. Polybius' theory largely rests on the concept of internal friction driving political violence and decay. Analyzing the role of political violence in the Roman Republic's downfall is useful in how it may assist the American Republic, and a study of Polybius' theory is also helpful in contextualizing how Rome's fall was envisioned on the basis of theory.

Conclusion

The employment of political violence had its own costs, with the history of the Late Roman Republic being paved with the corpses of politicians and civilians. The actions from 133 BCE to 81 BCE embedded violence into the foundation of Roman political expression and created a republic which relied on such an instrument for its continued existence. The escalation of political violence brought forth a new reality in Rome where legitimacy and influence resided in force of arms above all else. The figures which followed Sulla merely repeated the systems of violence already firmly set into place and the violent republic met its end when an alternative government of peace was offered to the battle-weary Romans, who

“preferred a safe present to former perils.”²⁵ This decision reformed the Roman Republic as much as the creation of the Tribunate had, except the instrumentalization and legitimization of political violence created a republic predicated on internal violence. Not only this, but by 82 BCE the violence of political liquidation had even been institutionalized as a legally sanctioned practice in the Imperial Republic. This Republic of Violence would only last for so long until its own violence undid itself and created the Rome of Emperors.

²⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* (London: The Penguin Group, 2012), 1.2.

Chapter One: The Impetus to Violence

In 133 BCE, Tiberius Gracchus, a sacrosanct tribune of the plebs, was publicly assassinated along with three hundred other Romans by a large group of Senators.²⁶ This act is considered by Plutarch and Appian to be “the first sedition at Rome, since the abolition of royal power, to end in bloodshed and the death of citizens,” and also the turning point at which the Roman Republic began its violent decline.²⁷ These assertions are only partly true; there are examples of political violence in the earlier days of the Roman Republic as explored in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, for the ancient writers, this was a watershed moment in the progression of the Roman Republic.

Furthermore, modern scholars largely agree that the decline of the Roman Republic began with Tiberius’ career and assassination and that this decline was the direct result of the employment of political violence. For example, in the recent popular book, *Mortal Republic*, Edward J. Watts asserts that “the Gracchi brothers were the first victims of this new world Tiberius created. They would not be the last.”²⁸ According to Watts’ and others’ characterizations, Tiberius’ assassins felt that his death was the historically precedented response to his usurping of Senatorial authority in order to triumph over political gridlock. The origin of the violence and its subsequent effects were caused by a single individual.

²⁶ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus* (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1921), 19.5.

²⁷ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 20.1. στάσις implies an insurrection or some form of dissention which is uniquely political in its form and is separate from other forms of violence.

²⁸ Edward J. Watts, *Mortal Republic: How Rome Fell into Tyranny* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2018), 96.

While the Roman Republic began its decline during Tiberius' career, the decline came about from institutional, rather than individual, failure. Political violence thereupon became the most effective recourse to overcome the political gridlock generated by this republican failure. First, the Senate was unwilling at multiple points to address the issue of agrarian reform and even stifled Tiberius' efforts with every measure at their disposal. Tiberius then, lacking the traditional systems of overcoming political gridlock, resorted to the threat of political violence and a usurpation of senatorial powers. Nasica's reaction of actual political violence then found justification in Roman precedence despite its deleterious effect on an already failing system. The political violence which became a staple of the late Roman Republic was therefore a symptom of dysfunctional republicanism. The Roman Republic's failure was brought about by the inability of its systems to effectively adapt to its new Imperial reality and was not the result of individuals undercutting its supposedly functioning institutions.

Tiberius' Land Bill

The necessity for Tiberius' land bill is generally viewed as the result of a phenomenon known as the "agrarian shift" in the Imperial Republic. The agrarian shift is a theory posited both by ancient sources such as Plutarch and modern historians such as Arnold J. Toynbee. It argues that a demographic change occurred during the Imperial Republic which saw small, independent farmers lose their lands to massive slave estates (*latifundia*) owned by wealthy aristocrats.²⁹ After the Second Punic War's conclusion in 201 BCE, many farmlands in Italy had been left utterly ravaged, and the economy of Rome was permanently

²⁹ Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I* (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1913), I.7.

altered. The result of the Imperial Republic's growth was the creation of outrageously wealthy aristocrats pitted against a burgeoning class of new, landless poor.³⁰ Furthermore, as the Imperial Republic's campaigns became more far-flung and took longer to complete, many soldiers' farmlands fell into disrepair, which left households in serious debt.³¹ In this new Imperial reality, the wealthier classes quickly expanded their villa complexes staffed with slaves by offering to buy off the debt-ridden land. Along with this, these same aristocrats were simultaneously absorbing more and more of the *ager publicus* or public land which, according to the agrarian myth of Roman society, was meant to be cultivated by Roman farmers with specifically defined (but rarely enforced) limits on how much could be used per household (this limit being 500 iugera). According to the theory, then, the result of the exploitation by the aristocrats was an expansion of *latifundia*, a decrease in independent Roman farmers, and an influx of now landless farmers into the capital city of Rome.

While this theory was accepted by ancient historians, the veracity of this transformation has undergone criticism by modern scholarship. Modern economic historians such as Luuk de Light and Dominic Rathbone now question the severity of this change as modern analysis of these lands do not corroborate the accounts of mass villa expansion.³² They argue instead that the change/overhaul was really only prevalent in specific areas, such as the coastal districts of Etruria, or was just a misinterpretation of various demographic changes by the Romans.³³

³⁰ Watts, *Mortal Republic*, 65-66.

³¹ Mike Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm: The Beginning of the end of the Roman Republic* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2017), 20.

³² Luuk de Light, "The Economy: Agrarian Change during the Second Century," *A Companion to the Roman Republic* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010), 597; Dominic Rathbone, "The Development of Agriculture in the 'Ager Cosanus' during the Roman Republic: Problems of Evidence and Interpretation," *The Journal of Roman Studies Vol. 71* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 22.

³³ De Light, "The Economy: Agrarian Change during the Second Century," 603.

Although the pervasiveness of this issue has been confirmed to be somewhat overblown by modern economic historians, the ancient tribunes felt that it was a problem demanding immediate action while also understanding the political capital it generated. Seeing how property formed much of the basis of Roman influence and wealth, this change in land ownership was considered wildly detrimental to plebeian interests no matter how overstated it may have been. In fact, the question of land ownership and land reform was so present in the Romans' consciousness that it is one of the most prevalent motifs of Livy's early annals on the Roman Republic, with Livy claiming that the issue was brought up as early as 486 BCE.³⁴ This retrojection is significant because it displays how the issue of land reform was so politically pertinent to the Romans, it could be anachronistically inserted into the early Republic with relative ease. More importantly, the issue of agrarian reform is treated as an issue spawning serious political tumult throughout the entirety of Plutarch and Appian's work on Tiberius Gracchus. In fact, Appian wholeheartedly affirms the validity of Tiberius' claims by stating, "The few who seemed to pay some respect to [the established public domain laws] conveyed their lands to their relations fraudulently, but the greater part disregarded it altogether."³⁵ To the Romans, this issue of land ownership was both very real and understood to have stark consequences on the independent, citizen farmers who constituted the backbone of the Roman agrarian identity. This issue had clear political power, because it gave the tribunes the capacity to stir up real political support and action on the part of the plebs.

³⁴ Livy, *The History of Rome*, 2.41.

³⁵ Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I*, 1.8.

Tiberius thereby chose to make this political issue the staple of his career. While Tiberius is now most famous for these attempts to assist independent plebeian farmers, his support of the plebs began much earlier. After saving many plebeian Roman soldiers during a campaign in Numantia at the beginning of his career, Tiberius ingratiated himself to many in the plebeian order while invoking the ire of senatorial aristocrats who viewed his actions as disgraceful and detrimental to Rome's prestige.³⁶ From the beginning of Tiberius' career, he had already displayed a sense of compassion for the plight of the plebs and was received with mild hostility from certain sections of the Senate.

After being elected tribune, Tiberius set about drafting his *Lex Sempronia Agraria*. This law sought to regulate the gathering and hoarding of public land by shifting land back to independent Roman farmers at the expense of the *latifundia*.³⁷ Quite simply, the bill confiscated the illegally held *ager publicus* from these villas and redistributed them to small-scale farmers with the express stipulation that such lands could not be further divided and sold again.³⁸ Plutarch claims that Tiberius did not act alone in creating this law, but rather worked with many leading senators, "among whom were Crassus the pontifex maximus, Mucius Scaevola the jurist, who was then consul, and Appius Claudius, his father-in-law."³⁹ The fact that multiple influential senatorial aristocrats aided Tiberius in drafting the law, if true, would highlight how the Senate itself was somewhat divided on this issue.

Tiberius' supposed destabilization of the Roman Republic began with the announcement of the bill itself. The Agrarian Reform faction, perceiving a senatorial refusal

³⁶ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 7.1-2.

³⁷ Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I*, 1.9.

³⁸ Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, 24.

³⁹ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 9.1.

to give their blessing to the controversial bill, chose instead to present the legislation directly to the people.⁴⁰ This action was likely predicated on the historical tradition that land reform had always been a contentious issue in the Roman Republic. As discussed in the previous chapter, while the Republic was particularly adept at managing issues of war and peace, it almost always moved at an egregiously slow pace when it came to social issues including enfranchisement, debt bondage, extension of rights, and land reform. Anticipating similar difficulties, Tiberius and his supporters attempted to undercut the Senate's ability to stall the legislative process by refusing to recognize their authority to view the bill before presenting it to the public:

While seeking the Senate's opinion on legislation was not technically required by law, it was a historically agreed upon norm (considered a part of the *mos maiorum*, or custom of the ancestors), one which allowed the Senate to impart some influence in the acts of tribunician legislation.⁴¹ The very first action taken by Tiberius and his supporters was therefore a deliberate effort to undermine some of the traditional authority of the Senate and effectively carve out a section of the government which did not have to recognize its traditional *auctoritas*. This choice would come to characterize the entirety of Tiberius' tribunate, which became a fierce struggle on the part of Tiberius to conquer the politically stagnant environment surrounding his bill. At the same time, it was also a largely unsuccessful struggle on the part of the Senate to hold on to its authority against Tiberius' onslaught.

⁴⁰ Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, 27.

⁴¹ Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, 27.

From this point onward, the Senate, recognizing both this bill's adverse effects on their economic interests and the frightening implications of Tiberius' disregard for the Senate's *auctoritas*, chose to stall the bill as best they could. The primary manner in which they accomplished this was by having another tribune, Marcus Octavius, endlessly veto the law so that it could never be voted upon by the people.⁴² This strategy of turning tribunes against each other was nothing new to Rome, as Livy suggests that such a maneuver found its origins all the way back to 480 BCE with Appius Claudius first suggesting its deployment.⁴³ While this is most certainly exaggerated, it is clear that this idea had historical precedent and was considered to be the emergency lever by which the Senate could influence tribunician law.

It is also very telling that relying upon Marcus Octavius' veto power was quite literally the first option to which the Senate resorted. Because their traditional influence on tribunician legislation had already been avoided or outmaneuvered, the emergency lever was immediately employed to check Tiberius' burgeoning power and influence. Essentially, the only way for the Senate to handle Tiberius' tribunate was by using the collegial structure of the tribunate against itself. The effect of this decision was a reestablishment of the political gridlock which traditionally stymied controversial social bills such as land reform throughout the history of the Roman Republic. In short, while Tiberius' first action was successful at clearing the Senate's direct possible influence on tribunician bills, it did not have the desired effect of skipping past a political impasse.

⁴² Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I*, I.12.

⁴³ Livy, *The History of Rome*, 2.44.

Emphasizing the institutional context for Tiberius' actions is imperative when examining the larger trajectory of the late Republic. When examining primary sources, the narrative of Tiberius' career often finds notable emphasis placed on his virtue, the virtue of his law, or both. Tiberius' character is praised by Plutarch and Appian as being particularly virtuous, while his law is often praised as being morally virtuous. Plutarch describes Tiberius as possessing "great incentives towards the emulation of virtue and its imitation in action" and his law is perceived as a reflection of his moral virtue.⁴⁴ Too much emphasis, however, is placed upon Tiberius' upstanding character and the validity of his law. The result of this approach is a glaring incongruity between Tiberius' supposed virtue and the deleterious instability his career brought to the Roman Republic.

Conversely, modern attempts to correct overly idealized characterizations of Tiberius are equally unhelpful. For example, Tiberius may have had "great ambition and a love of fame," but these are not adequate explanations as "these were traits that were widely admired among Rome's elite."⁴⁵ The actions of Tiberius are not symptomatic of his morality or personality, but a response to governmental instability. Therefore, when discussing his destabilizing decisions, it is essential to interpret Tiberius' actions as a microcosm of the broad institutional dysfunctionality of the Imperial Republic.

After the tactics of intimidation, begging, and even an offer of compensation for Octavius had failed, Tiberius was forced to recognize the impossibility of passing his bill under standard tribunician procedure. What deserves special attention is how this was not the first time tribunes were placed in a similar position. During the Conflict of the Orders, a

⁴⁴ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 4.4.

⁴⁵ Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola, Noel Lenski, Richard J. A. Talbert, *The Romans: From Village to Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 144.

number of bills, ranging from the creation of written laws to land reform, were purposefully stalled out in the political arena and were shepherded only through bold actions which often broke traditional norms. The most prominent example of this was the refusal of men to enlist in the army under tribunician protection and the multiple secessions of the plebs. These instances demonstrate how, in the specific issues of enfranchisement, land reform, and plebeian rights, extreme and often unprecedented actions had to be taken in order to overcome political deadlock and assert plebeian power.

The very nature of the tribunate as a state within a state created an atmosphere of tension in the Republic, but it was an essential office for maintaining a balance of influence in the Roman Republic. The elaborate political struggles between the plebs and the aristocracy were solved without political violence because of the delicate balance between the plebian ability to force compromise and the senatorial capacity to curtail legislation. While it was an environment of tension, institutionalized safeguards such as vetoes and secessions kept the competing powers in some form of contentious harmony.

Tiberius now faced what he perceived as another social crisis, but because of the nature of this new Imperial Republic, these traditional actions no longer were effective. Rome itself was not under constant threat from a neighboring state, and this removed the impact or legislative/political effectiveness of plebeians refusing to enlist in the army. The necessity of compromise instigated by plebeian resistance was no longer a valid tactic due to the vast size and permanently changed nature of the Imperial Republic. The Imperial Republic essentially removed the most powerful tool the tribunes possessed in overcoming political gridlock and forcing some sort of compromise.

Lacking these tactics, Tiberius first chose to halt all public business in Rome and place the government in a standstill. This concept of retracting a vital component of the city-state as a form of breaching impasses is remarkably similar to the secession of the plebs, except now it was a retraction of public business rather than the plebeians themselves. Tiberius also utilized constant threats of political violence until action on his bill was taken. On the day of voting, “the supporters of Tiberius were numerous enough to force the issue, and were banding together for this purpose”; they only relented when “Manlius and Fulvius, men of consular dignity, fell down before Tiberius, clasped his hands, and with tears besought him to desist.”⁴⁶ Unfortunately for Tiberius, either method simply lacked the power to force a meaningful compromise.

Tiberius therefore elected to embrace a more forceful option. Tiberius spearheaded the deposing of his fellow tribune Marcus Octavius, an entirely unprecedented action. With a single vote, he thereby removed all possible opposition to his law.⁴⁷ This action alone had never been attempted in the entire history of the Roman Republic, and “broke with all *mos maiorum*.”⁴⁸ In order to emphasize just how radical this action was, Duncan writes, “No tribune had ever induced the Assembly to depose a colleague. It was unheard of.”⁴⁹

This overly dramatic phrasing conveys the sheer danger of this action, but Tiberius was still not finished as his threats of violence turned into action. Plutarch writes, “Tiberius ordered one of his freedmen to drag Octavius from the rostra; for Tiberius used his freedmen as officers, and this made the sight of Octavius dragged along with contumely a more pitiful

⁴⁶ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 11.1.

⁴⁷ Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I*, I.12.

⁴⁸ Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, 31.

⁴⁹ Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, 31.

one.”⁵⁰ Octavius barely escaped the wrath of the mob Tiberius had organized. Tiberius then appropriated the money bequeathed by King Attalus of Pergamum to the state of Rome, claiming that he would reevaluate the will left behind.⁵¹

With his deposition of Octavius, Tiberius removed the manner by which the Senate could interfere with the bill’s passage. By seizing the funds and will of Attalus, Tiberius removed the Senate’s traditional control of the purse. Polybius, when writing about the idyllic balance of power in the Roman Republic, describes the Senate as having “control of the treasury and regulates the flow of all revenue and expenditure.”⁵² Seeing how Polybius attributes most of the power of the Senate to its total control over finances, these actions by Tiberius essentially neutered the Senate’s power for the purpose of reclaiming this plebeian political power.⁵³

Most notably, though, by resorting to threats of political violence, even organizing a mob, Tiberius had successfully reasserted the plebeian capacity to defeat political gridlock. The cost of this action was great, as it cemented the idea that violence would be necessary in the coming political squabbles. This ominous message would be further clarified by the violent reaction of Tiberius’ enemies leading to the tribune’s assassination.

Tiberius’ Assassination

When properly contextualizing Tiberius’ actions and their consequences, his subsequent assassination at the hands of Nasica, a senator and *latifundia* owner, and followers becomes similarly justifiable within the Roman mindset and system of the

⁵⁰ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 12.4.

⁵¹ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 14.1-4.

⁵² Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.13.

⁵³ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.13.

Republic. Such a characterization, however, is contrary to the traditional accounts of this moment. Nasica has been consistently portrayed in a negative light on account of this deadly decision. Consider Appian's description of the aftermath of Nasica actions:

The city was divided between sorrow and joy. Some mourned for themselves and for him, and deplored the present condition of things, believing that the commonwealth no longer existed, but had been supplanted by force and violence. Others considered that their dearest wishes were accomplished.⁵⁴

This description seemingly condemns the actions of Nasica by remaining sympathetic to Tiberius' partisans and oversimplifying the motivations of his assassins. Appian goes even further by suggesting that Nasica covered his head before setting out to murder Tiberius "in order to conceal himself from the gods on account of what he was about to do" while also denoting the religious implications of a Roman sacrifice.⁵⁵ Plutarch is hardly more sympathetic, claiming, "Publius Nasica [had] surrendered completely to his hatred of Tiberius. For he was a very large holder of public land, and bitterly resented his being forced to give it up."⁵⁶ Modern sources often paint a more dangerous picture of Tiberius' career, but they are equally unsympathetic to the actions of Nasica.⁵⁷

Nasica, however, is not so simple a villain and, because of this, it is necessary to properly contextualize his actions within the institutional structure. Nasica and his fellow conspirators were witnessing a tribune who had entirely outmaneuvered the Senate and usurped their authority in handling the powers of the purse and foreign relations. Even worse, Tiberius was running for reelection which prevented any ability for Nasica and his senators

⁵⁴ Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I*, II.17.

⁵⁵ Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I*, II.16.

⁵⁶ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 13.3.

⁵⁷ C. F. Konrad, "From the Gracchi to the First Civil War," *A Companion to the Roman Republic* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010), 170.

to hold him accountable for his multiple offenses of overreach. There was no option made available for judicial recourse and, as a result, to Nasica, political violence as tyrannicide was the most effective option for saving the Republic.

Rome had a few examples of political violence in its early days, spanning from the deaths of Spurius Cassius and Spurius Maelius, all the way back to the overthrow of Tarquin and the killing of Remus.⁵⁸ These acts, famously celebrated by Livy in the first five books of his *Ab Urbe Condita*, are praised in accordance with the Roman tradition of revering and adhering to the *mos maiorum*. All these cases signify a historical standard set by these beloved ancestors of political violence being justified against those who overstep their bounds (both politically and physically). The concept of tyrannicide as legitimized violence was a facet seen throughout the Mediterranean World, and Rome exemplified this ideology. Because of these examples, the idea of political violence as a useful and sometimes necessary act was already embedded into the Roman consciousness.

When Nasica claimed “Follow me you who would save the fatherland” (ἐβόα τε μέγιστον ἔπεσθαί οἱ τοὺς ἐθέλοντας σῶζεσθαι τὴν πατρίδα), he was calling upon this very tradition.⁵⁹ In Plutarch’s description of Nasica’s actions, he makes use of the word τύραννον (tyrant) to denote just how dangerous Nasica found Tiberius. Nasica calls upon the buzzword of rex in an attempt to describe a crime against the Republic so heinous that immediate and violent action would be necessary. In the Roman Republic, an accusation of kingship or tyranny was a death sentence due to the favorable attitude towards tyrannicide in the public consciousness. Furthermore, Nasica’s subsequent punishment for Tiberius’ assassination and

⁵⁸ Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.7, 1.59, 2.41, 4.13.

⁵⁹ Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I*, II.16. (This is my personal translation)

his expulsion from Rome apparently left him despondent, which supports this narrative of Nasica viewing himself as being unjustly treated as he considered himself a savior of the Republic.⁶⁰ Clearly, throughout the assassination, Nasica was using the old Roman tradition of political violence to handle this new example of what he perceived as tyranny. With all of Nasica's actions properly contextualized, it becomes more understandable how Scipio Aemilianus would quote Homer in saying, "So, too, may any other also be destroyed by who does such deeds."⁶¹ Rather than callous words toward his fellow statesman and brother-in-law, he too recognized just how unconstitutionally Tiberius had behaved.

Now it is true that the earlier examples of political violence occurred after the tribune had left office or with the appointment of a dictator. In the situation with Tiberius, waiting for him to leave office or appointing a dictator was entirely neglected. Even Appian writes, "It is astonishing to me that they never thought of appointing a dictator in this emergency, although they had often been protected by the government of a single ruler in such times of peril; but a resource which had been found most useful in former times was never even recollected by the people, either then or later."⁶³ Even so, this just further encapsulates how Tiberius' possible reelection and his tyrannical actions seemed to necessitate immediate action outside of standard procedures on the part of the Romans. Nasica saw his actions as an attempt at reestablishing the classic balance of powers in the Roman Republic.

That Nasica failed to secure lasting peace with his violent action again had less to do with his individual behavior and more with the system at large. The failure of assassination to curb future power overreaches was largely a result of the Imperial Republic still requiring

⁶⁰ Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, 40.

⁶¹ Homer, *The Odyssey* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), I.47.

⁶³ Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I*, II.16.

some way to outmaneuver its political impasses in order to address its pressing internal concerns. Once again, the theme of past solutions to political gridlock becoming obsolete when faced with the realities of the Imperial Republic is shown in full.

Tiberius' Significance

Overall, Tiberius' actions were most certainly unprecedented; however, modern historians can place too much emphasis on the shattering of norms. For example, Mike Duncan considers Tiberius' actions to be devastating to the Roman Republic because they constituted a break in the *mos maiorum*. He writes, "With all the taboos of the *mos maiorum* now breaking down left and right, 'this was the beginning in Rome of civil bloodshed, and of the license of the sword.'"⁶⁵ Quotations such as this highlight the idea of a direct pairing between Republican decline and the breaking of traditional paradigms.⁶⁶

While there is a correlation between the destruction of traditional paradigms and the violent destruction of the Roman Republic, the relationship is not a simple cause and effect. Going against the *mos maiorum* was nothing new in the Roman Republic. Ironically, the Roman Republic held a longstanding historical precedent for the breaking of precedent. The secession of the plebs, the action which secured fundamental rights for the plebeians and the creation of the tribunate, was itself a complete shattering of traditional norms, yet this action greatly strengthened the Republic, rather than destroyed it. The Conflict of the Orders allowed plebeians to be elected to higher magistracies, created a state within a state, and institutionalized a system of laws binding to both themselves and the Senate.⁶⁷ All of these

⁶⁵ Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, 197.

⁶⁶ Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, 37.

⁶⁷ Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 32.

actions were in clear defiance to the *mos maiorum* and were precedent-shattering, but there are no arguments put forward claiming that these moves were a negative toward the Roman Republic. In fact, Polybius suggests that the Roman Republic was the direct result of “the lessons learned from many struggles and difficulties; and finally, by always choosing the better course in the light of experience acquired from disasters.”⁶⁸ The Polybian “perfect” Roman constitution was the direct result of entire groups of Romans challenging the *mos maiorum* in fierce civil conflicts and creating new institutions and a new Roman order as a result of these tumults. With these facts in mind, it is overly simplistic to attribute the decline of the Roman Republic and Tiberius’ contribution to this process as a result of the destruction of the *mos maiorum*; the breaking of traditional paradigms was not unique to this era of Roman politics, and it had been beneficial in the past.

The more accurate explanation for Tiberius’ contribution to the destabilization of the Roman Republic lies in his overly effective manner in removing the political impasses which had characterized social issues in the Roman Republic since its foundation. In the days of the early Roman Republic, the plebs broke these political impasses by refusing to perform their function within the Roman city-state. Tiberius chose to break this gridlock by absorbing the functions of the Senate and even their influence on the tribunate into a single tribunician office. In deposing Octavius, Tiberius demonstrated a level of tribunician influence far exceeding that of the Senate’s; he directly overrode their authority in foreign diplomacy and matters of finance with his actions regarding Pergamum. In doing this, Tiberius created a tyrannical tribunate capable of smashing through any potential political gridlock.

⁶⁸ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.10.

Still, we must be careful to not focus solely on Tiberius as an individual agent. An argument that is often made is that Tiberius began the process of self-serving individuals who led the decline of the Roman Republic. Most emblematic of this view is the recent popular history *Mortal Republic* by Edward J. Watts. His work concerning the Late Roman Republic seeks to both understand specifically what causes a robust republic to descend to a point where it accepts tyranny, and also to apply these lessons to the United States. He writes, “Thousands of average men, talented men, and middling men all willingly undercut the power of the Republic to restrict and channel the ambitions of the individual, doing so in the interest of their own shortsighted gains.”⁶⁹ By choosing to take such drastic actions, Watts argues that Tiberius thus willingly destabilized the Republic by his own volition. His argument blames the Republic’s downfall on the inability of thousands of individuals to properly care for its institutions. Watts errs in downplaying the role of republican system failure had on driving the shortsighted actions of said individuals.

The example of Tiberius underscores how the Republic’s institutions were failing before these thousands of men began to undercut it. The Imperial Republic slashed the capacity of plebs to fight back against gridlock, and Tiberius recognized how the only way for the plebs to regain this ability was by seizing it straight from the Senate. In order to accomplish this, Tiberius began to employ both threats and actual shows of force. In order to recover the capacity of the tribunate to overcome political gridlock, political violence became the chief solution. In the same manner, the way for the Senate to reassert its traditional influence on the Republic was via political violence. Political violence was not the tool of

⁶⁹ Watts, *Mortal Republic*, 281.

thousands of shortsighted individuals, but rather the necessary recourse for these failing institutions to reassert their traditional political capacities.

Watts further characterizes Tiberius as a man who “chose to attack the patterns of political behavior that had promoted deliberation and compromise in the Republic for 150 years.”⁷² This is again not entirely accurate. These mythical politics of deliberation were explicitly the result of a delicate balance of forced compromises within Republican institutions which ceased to exist for Tiberius. Tiberius was just as ambitious to fight political gridlock as the tribunes of the Early Republic; the only difference lies in the political tools available to them. To the ancient Roman tribunes addressing social issues, the secession of the plebs and their refusal to enlist in the army was always a valid and effective option. In contrast, for Tiberius, the only option he saw available was tyranny and political violence. In an exactly similar way, the Senate of the early Republic had tools to counteract the secessions and the refusals to enlist. Lictors could arrest those who refused to enlist, appeal to Roman nationalism, and wield influence over the other tribunes. By the time the choice to assassinate Tiberius was taken, the nonviolent methods of curbing tribunician influence had utterly failed. What is being observed here is institutional failure, not individual decline.

The ascension of Gaius Gracchus after Tiberius’ death further proves this point. A tyrannical tribunate with access to political violence now took on the same role as the plebs’ refusal to enlist, as it was the primary vehicle by which political impasses could be overcome. Gaius Gracchus attempted to address issues ranging from subsidized food for the *plebs urbana* to the issue of enfranchising those with Latin rights.⁷³ The Senate, equally

⁷² Watts, *Mortal Republic*, 95.

⁷³ Appian, *The Civil Wars: Book I*, III.23.

recognizing the danger presented by this tribunate, utilized the office's power against itself by having Drusus out-politic Gaius to restore its political gridlock. Even though this had largely been successful, the Senate once again resorted to political violence and even enshrined it as the *Senatus Consultum Ultimum*.⁷⁴ This ultimatum was an official decree from the Senate which carried with it an ambiguity that could justify the utilization of political violence. It was the realization on the part of the Senate how political violence had become the most effective tool in maintaining their preferred balance. This tactic represented the way for the Senate to defend itself against the political strength that was this new tribunate. Likewise, this tribunate, reinforced by Gaius Gracchus and fortified with its usage of political threats and violence, was the new effective manner in overcoming the political gridlock which had been a staple of social issues in the Roman Republic since its foundation. Gaius Gracchus' actions as tribune and his assassination reinforced this new Roman cycle of gridlock, violence, and counterviolence.

The nature of the *Senatus Consultum Ultimum* is something worthy of special emphasis. This decree was an entirely novel invention on the part of the Senate and reflected the evolution of the Republic seen during the Conflict of the Orders, but with the difference of violence. The *Senatus Consultum Ultimum* was first employed as a reaction to the failure of Rome's institutions during the careers of the Gracchi. Such failures led the Senate to introduce a new decree which would help guide Rome through crisis. Much like the creation of the Tribunes during The Conflict of the Orders, new powers (in this case the ultimatum) were institutionalized to address the shortcomings of Rome's Republic. This time, however, the powers delegated were left deliberately vague, and therefore could be used as a

⁷⁴ Duncan, *The Storm Before the Storm*, 75.

justification for political violence. Essentially, the *Senatus Consultum Ultimum* indicated the necessity for political reform within the context of crisis in the Imperial Republic, and how violence would play a key role as both the impetus and mode of change.

The examples of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus showcase two sides resorting to political violence as a result of the failure of their traditional systems of balance. Gaius and his assassins' significance to the narrative of the Republic's decline was their confirmation of Tiberius' and Nasicus's methods as the new cycle of compromise. Their stubborn continuation of Nasicus's and Tiberius' policies demonstrate how neither party saw a meaningful alternative manner of resolving contentious social dilemmas within the context of this new Imperial Republic. This cycle of justified political violence would later be enshrined by advocate Marcus Antonius, who successfully argued in the defense of Gaius Norbanus in 95 BCE that "on the basis of Rome's political history...popular violence was often just and often necessary in order to secure the people's rights."⁷⁵ This example demonstrates the advancement of violence to a point of justifiable instrumentalization. Political violence was the political tool to replace the failing previous methods of forced compromise. Even to the Romans of this time, political violence was seen as an unfortunately necessary aspect of its republic in the most extreme scenarios. The key to the Late Republic was how its consistent institutional failure for forced compromise kept leading to these same extreme scenarios.

Conclusion

At its essence, the Imperial Republic was the failed attempt to govern and regulate an expansive empire within the context of a competitive city-state Republic. The techniques

⁷⁵ Jeffery Tatum, *The Cambridge World History of Violence: Volume 1, The Prehistoric and Ancient Worlds* (Cambridge University Press 2020), 405.

such as the secession of the plebs, which was the quintessential bargaining tool of the plebeians, was entirely nullified simply by the expanse of the Republic. And yet there was still this obsession with tradition and of the *mos maiorum* in the Late Republic, despite the fact that such methods were neither intended for nor were effective in maintaining an empire.

Even Tiberius' law demonstrates this juxtaposition quite well. The Lex Sempronia Agraria was the stubborn refusal for the agrarian class to recognize the social revolutions occurring in Rome. The fact of the matter is that by the time of the Imperial Republic, the era of the small-independent farmer was over and had been replaced by a new system of *latifundia*. Tiberius' law was an attempt to refute this imperial change and was a vain attempt to return the Roman Republic to the overly lauded days of independent agrarian dominance.

The Late Roman Republic demonstrates a long series of struggles between the fantasies of antiquity with the violent reality of its imperial modernity. The institutions of the Roman Republic were not equipped to handle the necessities of its empire and, where these systems failed to succeed, political violence was introduced as an immediate solution. Violence was the symptom of a government unable to handle the contentious issues of its empire. In the Imperial Republic, the issues being wrestled with had a larger scope than ever before; neither side could afford the consequences of defeat, and the old systems of forcing compromise were rendered obsolete. With these parameters established, political violence, described before as the simplest way to overcome governmental adversity, was made far more likely.

With this in mind, it is also important to underscore the limited implementation of political violence. At this time, the majority of successful legislative proposals were still passed peacefully via Rome's traditional institutions. The controversy observed with Tiberius

and Gaius' legislation was nothing to the Roman Republic, as agrarian and social reforms were the chief object of contention throughout the entire history of the Republic.⁷⁶ In fact, the Conflict of the Orders was an example of how the Republic experienced, from its conception, a series of significant crises concerning agrarian and social reform. The legislative proposals of the Gracchi represented a continuation of these specific crises, but now in an Imperial setting. In this new Imperial reality, political violence was the new method to achieve success when facing these same crises. The scope of the Imperial Republic made political violence a far more attractive option, as it possessed the efficacy to force an empire to recognize the demands of its wielder.

Tiberius was merely the first case of this. Here the plebeian farmers were facing a crisis and unfortunately, the traditional means of forcing through plebeian-favored legislation was no longer available. Tiberius, in order to restore this ability to the plebs, resorted to intimidation, coercion, and forced removal. He employed threats alongside mob intimidation and created a tyrannical tribunate as a means to break political gridlock.⁷⁷ Because the Republic's manner of plebeian political bargaining was no longer effective, Tiberius had to turn to political violence as a means to restore this core functionality to the plebs, and this authority granted to the plebs by Tiberius was stolen from the Senate. As a result of this, the now enfeebled Senate was carved out of the legislative process and certain Senators chose to resort to violence as a means of immediately restoring its authority. What is critical is how both sides were forced to turn to employing political violence to retain what they considered to be vital cores of the traditional Roman Republic, be it the capacity of the plebs to

⁷⁶ Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 269.

⁷⁷ Plutarch, *The Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 12.1-5.

overcome gridlock or the Senate's influence over legislation, diplomacy, and financial matters. By the time of Gaius Gracchus, this intricate political process was further reinforced. Gaius Gracchus utilized the tyrannical tribunate in order to address social issues while overcoming gridlock; the Senate once more chose to embrace political violence, intimidation, and coercion in order to keep Gaius' power in check.

In these examples, political violence was the most effective recourse. Political violence not only provided a solution with finality to Rome's most contentious issues, but it did so with an immediacy not present in the Republic's traditional institutions. Similar to the Conflict of the Orders, the Late Roman Republic maintained a delicate political balance between the patricians and various plebeian groups via precedent-shattering political actions. The difference was the use of violent suppression rather than secession as a means of handling large-scale social disputes and gridlock. In a Republic of failing republicanism, political gridlock becomes inevitable, with political violence serving as the effective tool in overcoming impasses and also in restoring them. The tragedy of the Roman Republic is not a story of thousands of individuals simply allowing its institutions to fall apart, but rather the unfortunate reality of the ancient traditions of the Roman Republic failing to address the pressing concerns of the Imperial Republic.

Chapter Two: Marius' Violent Alliance

In 101 BCE, after his resounding success fighting off encroaching German tribes in northern Italy, Gaius Marius was hailed as the savior of Italy.⁷⁸ Just fifteen years later, this savior would execute the first mass citizen slaughter in the city of Rome. Marius' career is often explained by focusing on this juxtaposition between his rise to prominence and fall from grace.⁷⁹ While Marius' career as general and entanglements with Sulla are essential to a strong understanding of Rome, this chapter focuses on the less famous period which took place in between his campaigns and civil wars: specifically, Marius' sixth consulship.

This period of Marius' political career oversaw an escalation of political violence within the failing Roman Republic. It explores the union of Marius as consul of 100 BCE, with the fiery politicians Saturninus and Glaucia and analyzes the impact of their powerful and bloody alliance on the further instrumentalization of political violence. Specifically, under their union, violence shifted to professional gangs staffed by veterans and was no longer exclusively reserved for political emergencies. Additionally, chiefly through political violence were Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia were able to fulfill their political agendas. The Imperial Republic's instrumentalization of violence served their needs far better than the city-state's republican magistrates. In the end, their careers became entirely dependent on the perpetual threat of this violence.

Alliance

⁷⁸ Konrad, "From the Gracchi to the First Civil War," 175.

⁷⁹ H. H. Scullard, "The Rise and Fall of Marius," *From the Gracchi to Nero* (Oxfordshire: Routledge Classics, 2011), 36; Konrad, "From the Gracchi to the First Civil War," 177.

To begin with, it is necessary to investigate the careers of Saturninus and Glaucia independent of Marius' personal influence. The importance of Saturninus and Glaucia's individual careers - that is to say, what they accomplished without Marius' direct presence - demonstrates that political violence had already been made more commonplace at this point. The rocky nature of their careers also forms an excellent juxtaposition to their political safety after they had Marius' presence and full backing.

The first reference to Saturninus' career begins with his removal from the position of quaestor – a public revenue office – by the Senate in the year 104 BCE.⁸⁰ Diodorus Siculus places his removal and replacement by the powerful aristocrat, Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, as a direct result of “his laziness and his debased character,” though there is no evidence of Saturninus ever having charges brought up against him for his actions as quaestor.⁸¹ After this debacle, Saturninus would exclusively associate himself with plebeian causes and become a deliberate thorn in the side of the aristocratic Senate. His actions of abuse and violence would come to dominate the depictions of both him and his partner-in-crime, Glaucia. Information on Glaucia is less readily available, as reference to him is framed through his cooperation with Saturninus.⁸² For the purpose of this chapter, it is best to analyze Glaucia as devoted, though far less prominent, political ally.

What is notable about Saturninus' and Glaucia's individual careers is how mixed their successes were. Without Marius' presence, Glaucia and Saturninus' feats lie more with them barely escaping repercussions from the Senate. To start with, when envoys from the Pontic

⁸⁰ Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica Translated by Andrew Smith* (Attalus, 2013), Book 36.12.

⁸¹ Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, Book 36.

⁸² Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1920), 28.5; this is the only mention of Glaucia, and it is solely his role as Saturninus' accomplice.

king Mithridates VI arrived in Rome in 101 BCE with money meant to bribe the Senate, Saturninus, then tribune, “thinking now that he had a cause to attack the Senate, reproached and abused the embassy.”⁸³ This was a major Roman taboo and Saturninus, as Diodorus Siculus reports, was “at risk of being condemned to death by the Senate.”⁸⁴ He only escaped this punishment by rallying a mob and getting them to swarm the tribunal “so that he was unexpectedly released from the charges; and with the support of the people, he was again appointed tribune.”⁸⁵

Another example of Saturninus and Glaucia’s individual struggles is found in their near removal from Senatorial order. According to Appian, “the censor, Quintus Caecilius Metellus, attempted to degrade Glaucia, a senator, and Appuleius Saturninus, who had already been a tribune, on account of their disgraceful mode of life, but was not able to do so because his colleague would not agree to it.”⁸⁶ This action would set Metellus Numidicus as a clear rival and antagonist to both Saturninus and Glaucia.

The final example involves Saturninus’ prosecution of former consuls Gnaeus Maximus and Quintus Caepio for the disaster at Arausio.⁸⁷ The two consuls were tasked with defeating the Cimbri tribe in northern Italy, but incompetence and bitterness between the consuls led to a massacre of the Roman army by the northern tribes in 105 BCE.⁸⁸ This refusal to cooperate was emblematic of the greater frictions which were violently erupting in the Imperial Republic. During the prosecution, opposing tribunes were forced out of the

⁸³ Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, Book 36.15.

⁸⁴ Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, Book 36.15.

⁸⁵ Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, Book 36.15.

⁸⁶ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, 1V.28.

⁸⁷ Scullard, *From Gracchi to Nero*, 46.

⁸⁸ Boatwright, *The Romans*, 160.

hearing and (nonfatal) violence was done to the *Princeps Senatus*.⁸⁹ These methods were implemented in order to get the guilty verdict Saturninus wanted for Caepio, though, despite the success of political violence, he was set free shortly afterwards.⁹⁰ This entire debacle led to Saturninus establishing something akin to a treason court, designed to try Senators who betrayed the dignity of the Roman Republic.⁹¹ The purpose of the treason court was explicitly to harbor accusations against senatorial rivals and was another manifestation of the rising tensions between the Senate and radical tribunes. Political violence was not the only tool to be promulgated in the wake of republican failure, but it was the most effective.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these examples. First, the Senate clearly recognized the threat posed by Saturninus and Glaucia and, on multiple occasions, tried to curb their influence. The actions of the Senate against Saturninus and Glaucia are entirely focused on stripping them of their power, and the removal of Saturninus from the position of quaestor may also have been an early example of this phenomenon. It is clear here that the Senate learned from the example of the Gracchi on the dangers that popular tribunes accompanied by a mob following posed to them. Numidicus and the Senate wanted to prevent a new wave of Gracchi politicians and attempted to utilize the traditional powers of the Senate to contain the two.

Still, even when the Senate had Saturninus in a state of definitive guilt, the mob attack on the tribunal was effective enough to overturn a lawful process. Here political violence was no longer being used as just a means to overcome political gridlock, but had been weaponized further to overrule the traditional processes of the Roman Republic.

⁸⁹ Scullard, *From Gracchi to Nero*, 46.

⁹⁰ Scullard, *From Gracchi to Nero*, 46.

⁹¹ Scullard, *From Gracchi to Nero*, 46.

Whereas before political violence was introduced when the Roman Republic was not functioning properly, now it was being implemented even when the Roman Republic was operating as intended. Political violence could serve as a solution to ailing systems, but also as a means of empowering politicians against the very same systems. Along with this, the example of the prosecution of Caepio demonstrates just how ready Saturninus was to resort to political violence. The seemingly insurmountable roadblock that was the tribunician veto, was a complete non-entity in the career of Saturninus as it was simply ignored or dealt with by force. The veto's powers, which had held Tiberius' career hostage, did not have an effect when it was employed against Saturninus. This fact helps illuminate just how ingrained the system of political violence had become to the tribunician process. Political violence was the process by which this system worked; it had now evolved into a form of political expression which was seen as necessary to force through legislation. This would be the first of several advancements which Saturninus and Glaucia introduced with regards to political violence.

Despite these aggressive actions, the pattern of these exchanges between Saturninus, Glaucia, and the Senate nevertheless emphasizes just how essential Marius' personal support was. The legacy of Saturninus and Glaucia's career without Marius' personal involvement is one in which the pair just barely escape the Senate's actions. There is a clear back-and-forth of political exchanges and power plays between the two fiery politicians and the Senate. While Saturninus and Glaucia were versed in political violence, their influence was largely constrained by the threat of the Senate checking them on any potential action. Without Marius' assistance, Saturninus and Glaucia were often dangerously vulnerable to this aristocratic retaliation. It is essential to bear this pattern of behavior in mind as it is entirely upended via the introduction of a full-on Marian alliance into the political landscape. In fact,

when comparing the careers of Saturninus and Glaucia before this alliance and after, it can be safely asserted that the Senate had done a somewhat successful job in restricting the dangers the duo posed on the Roman Republic.

The Violent Alliance

Any check held by the Senate over Saturninus and Glaucia was lost once Marius joined the two in a political alliance and offered his veterans as support to their legislation. The actions of this alliance further propelled the evolution of political violence within the Roman Republic. The sheer power of the alliance allowed the trio to hold the Republic politically hostage. Despite being loathed by both their enemies and constituents, they were still able to overcome all the traditional political roadblocks and pass legislation. The shift to the perpetual threat of political violence via armed gangs of veterans meant that the trio possessed power capable of negating all existing opposition.

The pathway to this alliance began before Marius' triumphal return from the Cimbri War. Marius' earlier changes to how men enlisted in the army led to an increase in landless recruits.⁹² The result of this was an army dependent on his military command for the acquisition of plunder and the disbursement of land after the war. While Marius secured the loyalty of his veterans by making them the primary beneficiaries of his conquests, such loyalty was entirely contingent on Marius providing the wealth and land promised. In order to guarantee farmland for his veterans, Marius would require the passage of land distribution legislation. This is where Saturninus first combined his efforts with Marius, for Saturninus was a tribune capable of passing agrarian bills, and Marius' veterans provided the violent

⁹² Sallust, *The Jugurthine War* (London: The Penguin Group, 1963), 49.5-51.3.

means. Already, in Marius' fourth consulship, this dynamic was on display, with Saturninus distributing land to the veterans of the Jugurthine campaign over the opposition of his fellow tribunes.⁹³

After returning from his Cimbri campaign in 100 BCE, Marius faced an immediate challenge. Between the Jugurthine and Cimbri entanglements, Marius was a consul for war, not peace. Marius was now in the difficult position of running for reelection despite the lack of external crisis. Marius was able to win his election, though this was by "paying down large sums of money among the tribes, and by buying votes made Metellus lose his election to the office."⁹⁴ With Marius as consul, Glaucia as praetor, and Saturninus as tribune, the stage was set for a violent alliance which would hold the republic under its dominion.

Plutarch reports that this year made Marius particularly unpopular among both the people and the Senate due to his actions with Saturninus and Glaucia.⁹⁵ For example, Marius was implicated in the murder of Saturninus' rival tribunician candidate: Aulus Nonius.⁹⁶ Nonius was a harsh critic of Saturninus and Glaucia, and was even selected to be tribune above Saturninus. Saturninus was only able to claim the tribuneship in 100 BCE by having a gang rush and assassinate Nonius, assemble the gang early next morning, and have them elect Saturninus tribune before all the people had assembled.⁹⁷ Already, Marius' gang of veterans were being employed to trample the standard election process for the sake of guaranteeing Saturninus the power he desired and eliminating both his and Glaucia's critics. This political murder was only possible because of Marius' cooperation and pool of violent

⁹³ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 47.

⁹⁴ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 28.1.

⁹⁵ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 29.1.

⁹⁶ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, III.28.

⁹⁷ Appian Book, *The Civil Wars Book I*, III.28.

veterans to draw upon. It was the gang of veterans which murdered Nonius and assembled the next morning to proclaim Saturninus tribune by force. Furthermore, unlike the previous actions of Saturninus, because of the influence and power the three had in Rome, not a single member of this alliance faced any retaliation or prosecution for this murder. Despite the fact that Saturninus, Marius, and Glaucia were clearly guilty, they felt no consequences for this blatant action of political violence.

The last events of Marius' consulship during the alliance of note were the passing of Saturninus' Agrarian bill and the exile of Numidicus. The agrarian legislation was concerned with distributing land to Marius' dependent veterans.⁹⁸ Because the loyalty of Marius' veterans was contingent on the general providing them wealth and land, it was only natural that Marius would ensure the bill's passage via a gang of the very same veterans.

The bill experienced fierce opposition from all the nonviolent institutions of the Roman Republic. The tribunes vetoed the bill, calls were made to disband the assembly for religious reasons, and the bill was not even popular enough to pass with a majority vote.⁹⁹ The first two obstacles described were merely ignored, with Marius' gang of veterans being violently deployed to force out all opposition.¹⁰⁰

Adding insult to injury, the bill had an added stipulation that "the senators should take an oath within five days to obey it, and that anyone who should refuse to do so should be expelled from the Senate."¹⁰¹ The purpose of this stipulation was so "that [Marius] might catch Metellus in the toils of a fatal trick" and force him into exile.¹⁰² Metellus Numidicus

⁹⁸ Boatwright, *The Romans*, 165.

⁹⁹ Boatwright, *The Romans*, 166.

¹⁰⁰ Boatwright, *The Romans*, 166.

¹⁰¹ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, IV.28.

¹⁰² Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 29.2.

was a fierce political rival of Marius, who was popular enough to both get the cognomen *Numidicus* and was even elected censor.¹⁰³ The plan was a complete success and Numidicus was sent away into exile after refusing to swear an oath of loyalty. With a single stroke, Marius saw his dependent veterans rewarded for their loyalty and further indebted to him, while also sending his greatest rival, a former censor, into exile.

Overall, Plutarch's characterization of the growing hatred for Marius due to Saturninus' misdeeds carries a fair amount of accuracy.¹⁰⁴ The alliance of Marius, Glaucia, and Saturninus resulted in widespread political violence, ranging from gang attacks to assassinations. It even saw the expulsion of former censor and beloved politician Numidicus.

What is even more astounding are the enemies that the alliance created. Historian Howard Hayes Scullard points out how the land bill and the oath attached to it alienated the urban plebs, many former supports of the trio, and was anathema to the Senators.¹⁰⁵ While Scullard effectively points out how the three made enemies of many different Roman factions, he fails to adequately synthesize this fact with the actions of both the trio and their enemies. The key to this synthesis is an analysis of the evolution of the instrumentalization of political violence. Specifically, the essential element at play is how the agendas of Marius, Glaucia, and Saturninus could only be realized through political violence, and how such violence escalated the transformation of the Imperial Republic.

The Advancement of Political Violence

¹⁰³ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, IV.28.

¹⁰⁴ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 29.1.

¹⁰⁵ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 50.

The era of Marius, Glaucia, and Saturninus represents a dramatic advancement of political violence in the Roman Republic. This began with the way in which Marius expanded the scope and scale of political violence as a way of compensating for his lack of political prowess. It is well noted in Plutarch how Marius had more the temperament of a military commander than a politician. According to Plutarch, Marius displayed more bravery when facing the enemy in battle than he did when confronting the assemblies at home.¹⁰⁶ In his long career leading up to his sixth consulship, Marius did not secure easy success when engaging in politics in a traditional manner. He gravely insulted his patron family when he was elected tribune and threatened to imprison the consuls, and even lost the election for aedile after his tribune term had expired.¹⁰⁷ In fact, most of Marius' successes were largely a result of his campaigns, not his domestic politics.

Marius' later political success as consul was due to his integration of the military into the practice of political violence. Knowingly or not, Marius's previous reforms had ensured a steady supply of veterans fiercely loyal to him willing to carry out political violence for the purpose of furthering their commander's agenda and acquiring land. Furthermore, Marius tied the landless - a class which had just been the cause for major upheaval during the Gracchi - to the Roman military, further closing the bonds between politics in Rome and the Roman military abroad. Back at Rome, Marius was able to leverage his veterans' support into gangs willing to serve as political tools. Marius' later political career thereby blurred military command with domestic policy via the grafting element of political violence. The implementation of dependent veterans as gangs allowed Marius to extend his military

¹⁰⁶ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 28.1.

¹⁰⁷ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 4.1-4.

influence into Rome in a way no previous politician had been able to do. Essentially, Marius found a way to utilize his great military victories to further his political ambitions.

With the devout and violent support of the soldiery, Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia were free to face all manner of opposition and unpopularity from the Senate and many of their original supporters. Despite having a significant portion of the Republic's power base as either alienated or direct enemies as Scullard points out, Marius, Sulla, and Saturninus were free to commit mass bribery/election fraud, pass unpopular legislation as they pleased, assassinate political opponents, and even send into exile a former censor; all of this was accomplished with zero political repercussions. This combination of various magisterial positions, political influence, and the means to conduct political violence whenever necessary was the most effective means for control over the Roman Republic seen thus far.

Scholars have underemphasized the vast power of this alliance when analyzing the events of Marius' sixth consulship. For example, like Scullard, Mary Boatwright emphasizes the unpopular nature of these actions, discussing "the ugly use of force to ram the proposals through."¹⁰⁸ The issue once again is where the focus is placed. When dealing with political violence, unpopularity is a largely negligible factor, for the capacity of violence far outweighs the dangers of unpopularity. The chief lesson of Saturninus' agrarian bill of 100 BCE is just how much control effective implementation of political violence grants to its wielder. Saturninus and Glaucia provided laws favorable to Marius, and Marius supplied the veterans to achieve these aims by means of political violence. Whereas the violence of the

¹⁰⁸ Boatwright, *The Romans*, 166.

Gracchi was a last resort and was implemented by both the Senators and the tribunes, here it is first option ready to be wielded regularly.

Saturninus' land bill of 100 BCE illustrates just how normalized political violence had become. The ready deployment of Marius' veterans underscores how prepared Saturninus was to immediately abandon the standard forms of legislative compromise and politicking and instead resort to readily available violence. In fact, unlike in his previous land bill of 103 BCE, this specific piece of legislation contained no compromises to appeal to a wider demographics.¹⁰⁹ The reason for this is because, at this point in the Roman Republic, political violence was the new compromise when dealing with traditionally contentious issues of agrarian and social reform. In other words, it was the primary vehicle with which a politician could achieve his own political agenda. At this point in Roman history, political violence had been cemented as a key instrument and evolved into being the first option rather than just an emergency last resort. It became just as valid an option for solving political impasses as the Secession of the Plebs had been during the Conflict of the Orders. Political violence was the tool which corrected the inadequacies of Rome's attempt at managing an empire while maintaining a system designed for local republicanism.

In fact, political violence, due to its sheer effectiveness, scrapped the need altogether for the old manners of compromise. The tribunician veto which had previously stopped Tiberius Gracchus dead in his tracks had absolutely no effect on Saturninus. The religious portents which were of great importance to the highly superstitious Romans were entirely ignored. Not even the widespread opposition to the bill found both in the Senate and among

¹⁰⁹ Boatwright, *The Romans*, 166.

the present assembly of citizens - the group which the Tribunes were meant to represent - could do anything to stop the bill from being forced through. All the possible traditional levers of political opposition and obstruction were implemented against Saturninus' bill, and yet they were rendered entirely ineffective by this evolution in political violence.

While this violence was indeed effective, it must be remembered that it was still confined to overtly contentious legislative measures. The alliance was only utilizing its capacity for violence for issues that had always been controversial in Roman society, or for emergency assassinations. While violence had become a staple instrument which was freely employed for these purposes, it remained a measure designed for emergency instrumentalization.

The violent political beast created by Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia was so effective, the three held the entire Roman Republic in a political stranglehold, with a monopoly on its powers. This new system could not be so easily silenced as had been done with the Gracchi, and the result of this was a complete failure on the part of the Senate and Roman Populares to successfully oppose the trio despite their unpopularity. By agreeing to serve each other's interests and share power, the three broke past all the traditional divisions of balance and restrictions on power. This method of power sharing would become a staple of the Late Republic, and would prove itself a lethal poison to its existence. Its capacity to shatter the political back-and-forth in the Roman Republic greatly accelerated the discarding of the republic's traditional systems, yet the nearly absolute power it offered was simply too great to ignore.

This point can be further illustrated by examining the legislation successfully passed in the post-Gracchi political landscape. Bills passed over senatorial opposition skyrocketed in

their frequency once the Gracchi demonstrated its potential.¹¹⁰ Examples of this range from the agrarian bill just discussed, to the agrarian bill carried by Sextus Titus in 99 BCE, to the voting regulations passed by Marius in 119 BCE.¹¹¹ Once the Gracchi demonstrated the capacity of their extreme measures, it vastly expanded the possible legislative measures the Tribune could pass. The expansion of violence's size and scope also emboldened the scope of legislation. Violence made reforms possible on a scale which was only matched by the radical politics during the Conflict of the Orders.

The Destruction of the Alliance

If this combination of power was successful to the point of reducing the Roman Republic to the agenda of three men, why did it collapse? The main factor which led to the alliance's undoing was the internal dissension collapsing the foundation for such an alliance. While the alliance of Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia appeared strong and was able to function well for a time, its strength was predicated on a delicate and unstable internal balance. As long as all three members were working towards the same goal, they could find success. But if they differed in goals, the trio quickly turned their weapon of political violence against each other, not only collapsing the alliance, but killing its weaker members. This violence alliance system, while effective, was a tenuous and temporary tool at most and its reliance on violence almost guaranteed a violent ending. This violence only found success when all parties worked in tandem, and the moment this stopped, chaos broke out between the trio.

¹¹⁰ Henrik Mouritsen, *Plebs and Politics in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 69.

¹¹¹ Mouritsen, *Plebs and Politics*, 69.

There are multiple accounts as to why Marius broke off his alliance with Glaucia and Saturninus. Plutarch claims Marius took up arms due to his respect for the nobility,¹¹² Scullard argues that Marius took up arms out of his innate sense of morality,¹¹³ and Watts pessimistically asserts that Marius only reluctantly responded to the *Senatus Consultum Ultimum*.¹¹⁴ The pivotal moment came after the assassination of Gaius Memmius by Saturninus and Glaucia in an attempt to secure Glaucia's consulship.¹¹⁵ Of particular odium was the fact that this murder of a consular candidate came while the election itself was taking place.¹¹⁶ Marius chose to side with the Senate instead of his former allies. The *Senatus Consultum Ultimum*, a form of codified and sanctioned political violence, was invoked and Marius used his veteran forces to capture Saturninus and Glaucia. They were subsequently murdered by a mob of the citizens who had been greatly displeased by Saturninus' legislative measures.¹¹⁷

The moment Marius' goal differed from those of Saturninus and Glaucia, they swiftly became enemies. Future alliances fashioned in a similar manner to this one would also fall victim to this very flaw, as internal dissention tore each person and their respective resources away from each other. Furthermore, the very moment Marius abandoned the alliance, Saturninus and Glaucia had no hope of survival. As described above, the key to the alliance's success was its reliance on effective and readily available political violence. With Marius' veterans removed from the equation, Saturninus and Glaucia lost all the force behind their political presence. A process reliant on the perpetual option of violence could not function

¹¹² Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 30.1.

¹¹³ Scullard, *The Romans*, 50.

¹¹⁴ Watts, *Mortal Republic*, 115.

¹¹⁵ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, V.32.

¹¹⁶ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, V.32.

¹¹⁷ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 30.4.

unless this option was to be permanently enabled. This explains how the deaths of Saturninus and Glaucia were executed by the masses the moment they were vulnerable rather than while they were in an alliance with Marius.

In turn, Marius' career was irreparably changed once he abandoned his violent political strategies. Once Marius attempted to fit in with the political establishment, rather than hold it hostage with the threat of political violence, his career completely fell apart. As Plutarch retells, immediately "a decree was introduced recalling Metellus from exile," and although "Marius opposed it strongly both by word and deed" his efforts were wasted and Numidicus was brought back.¹¹⁸ Despite just recently having been the most powerful man in Rome - one who helped get Numidicus exiled in the first place - without political violence, Marius held very little real influence. The debacle was so bad, not only did it dash Marius' hopes at becoming a censor, but "unable to endure the sight of Metellus returning, he set sail for Cappadocia and Galatia."¹¹⁹ The complete failure of Marius' career after the dissolution of his alliance serves as a perfect juxtaposition to the heights of his success in the previous years. Political violence was the primary tool with which Marius was able to find his desired political success once inside the city of Rome. Once the threat of Marius' veterans was removed, his power immediately dwindled as he faded into obscurity. Marius' political ambitions in the city of Rome were predicated on political violence. Without political violence, Marius' career at home crumbled, but with it, Marius was able to achieve his total agenda. Essentially, violence done in foreign wars brought Marius popularity, but his policy

¹¹⁸ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 31.1.

¹¹⁹ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 31.

of domestic violence squandered this fame, albeit while simultaneously allowing him to find success in his political endeavors.

Much like the Gracchi before him, the success of Marius' domestic political agenda (the passing of his veteran land distribution bill and the banishment of his rival Numidicus) necessitated the application of political violence in order to be properly carried out. His political failings both before and after these resorts to violence place particular emphasis on just how essential it was for Marius' domestic plans. Violence, wielded through blurring the lines between military command and domestic politics, allowed Marius to escape the failings of Rome's traditional republican institutions which could not fulfill his agenda. Once more, political violence served as the immediate remedy to the inadequacies of the Roman Republic. Only through violence could Marius find the influence he desired at home. The designs of politicians expanded alongside the republic and, in this new imperial reality, the employment of normalized political violence (a facet unique to the Late Republic) was essential to realize the very designs of politicians like Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia.

Conclusion

The previous chapter described how violence was the solution to perpetual political gridlock and the threat of tyranny. With Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia, violence was the solution to the Republic's failure to realize their political aspirations. The Roman Republic was now not meeting both the desires of its citizens on a collective basis, but also the agendas of individual politicians. Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia chose to overtly avoid the possibility of perpetual political gridlock with their proposals by simply resorting to violence from the beginning. By immediately employing violence, the three avoid even needing to face the failings of the traditional republican systems. Violence was the savior of Marius'

career, and its absence displayed the gulf of effectiveness between Rome's nonviolent institutions, and the violent capacity for real political power.

Overall, the weaknesses of the political alliance created an odd paradox. By its nature, this political alliance could only exist for so long before violently falling apart from internal tension, yet its employment meant that one's career would be permanently reliant on political violence. The perpetual threat of political violence requires a permanent application which proved to be problematic for Marius once it was shown how the alliance could only exist in a temporary sense. This juxtaposition between a fleeting alliance and the need for a perpetual threat tore Marius' career apart once the alliance was destroyed and such issues would plague the similar alliances fashioned in the final years of the Roman Republic.

The era of the Gracchi is one which saw the utilization of political violence as an emergency option when faced with either a political impasse or political tyranny. The era of Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia saw political violence supplant the traditional methods of conflict resolution. The result of this was the creation of an alliance network with the capability to exert total dominion over the Republic's politics, though this required the near-perpetual threat of violence. The result of this was the instrumentalization of violence as a potent practice to overcome traditional political roadblocks. This era ingrained political violence as a necessary and metaphorically legitimate form of expression. In the next chapter, we shall see how this lesson of violence as the most effective vehicle for political ends became even further relevant and expanded into a new section of the Roman political landscape.

Chapter Three: The Efficacy of Social War

In 91 BCE, the Italian town of Asculum hunted and massacred all its Roman inhabitants in a blatant act of ethnic cleansing.¹²⁰ This violent act came to characterize the Social War (91-87 BCE), which plunged the Italian peninsula into chaos and introduced the possibility of civil war into the Roman political playbook. The Social War was essential in tying political expression to the tools of organized warfare.¹²¹ Furthermore, its success established the method of civil war as a powerful means of settling political conflicts.

While previous scholars are right to emphasize the Social War as precursor to the famous Civil Wars of the first century BCE, or as a civil war in its own right, more needs to be done on contextualizing it within the larger trajectory of the internalization of political violence within the Roman Republic. Much like the lead-up to the Gracchi brothers, its outbreak was the result of four decades of failed attempts at social reform via republican institutions separate from utilizing political violence. Much like Marius' violence alliance, the Social War demonstrated the continued efficacy of political violence in the Roman system and how dependent the Roman Republic had become on its practice of political violence. Now, however, the Social War revealed how the wielding of an active military machine for political purposes furthered the potential of political violence.

Failed Nonviolent Politics

¹²⁰ Mary Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 237.

¹²¹ Henrik Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 171.

Just as the changing nature of the Imperial Republic shifted how internal politics functioned, it also shifted how Rome's Italian allies saw their citizenship. The Late Roman Republic saw a multitude of failed ventures for Italian enfranchisement. These attempts once more demonstrated the Late Roman Republic's inability to react to issues of social reform in a timely manner. The uniqueness here is how Rome was now also failing to meet the social demands of its noncitizens.

Before going into the desire of Italian cities to expand their rights and become citizens of the Roman Republic, it is first necessary to go into the structure of Latin rights. The various cities of the Italian peninsula were placed on an intricate tiered system of rights and privileges.¹²² Those Italian allies who enjoyed Latin rights, or *ius Latii*, enjoyed significant autonomy and privileges in their community, though they were not considered Roman citizens and could not participate in the politics of the Roman government. This order benefitted the Italian allies when Rome had been confined to merely a regional Italian power, but as Rome expanded its empire across the Mediterranean, Roman citizenship became increasingly appealing.

The desire of the Italians for Roman citizenship seems to have begun alongside the Gracchi debacle. The provisions of Tiberius' land bill meant that Italian allies, despite having no say in the law's passage, had a great deal of "lawsuits hastily brought against them" as their lands were being redistributed.¹²³ In their anger, they "chose Cornelius Scipio, the destroyer of Carthage, to defend them against these grievances."¹²⁴ Scipio Aemilianus was

¹²² For more information on this, refer to section Seven of the first Chapter of *From the Gracchi to Nero* by Howard Hayes Scullard.

¹²³ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, III.19.

¹²⁴ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, III.19.

successfully able to get allied-held land exempt from the land redistribution and. Not only this, but Aemilianus apparently was planning on advocating in favor of expanding Roman citizenship, but his untimely death put an end to this plan.¹²⁵ Already, in 129 BCE, Romans were recognizing the growing appeal for some form of Roman citizenship for its Italian allies.

The next attempt for Italian enfranchisement came from the political ally of the Gracchi, Marcus Fulvius Flaccus. The consul of 125 BCE, Flaccus proposed a bill which would grant Roman citizenship to Italian allies who desired it.¹²⁶ Unfortunately for the proposal, it died the moment Flaccus was given command to fight the Gauls in Northern Italy and had to leave the city.

These two examples demonstrate how the desire for Roman citizenship among Italian allies was already strong enough to warrant the attention of two prominent politicians. Furthermore, despite the cry for Italian enfranchisement only being in its infancy, the offhand dismissal of these proposals signifies just how difficult the issue would be to pass via the non-violent channels of political reform. The already crushingly slow mechanisms of the Roman Republic would move at an even lessened pace for its Italian allies which, following the precedent of the Gracchi, guaranteed a violent solution.

The next attempt for Italian enfranchisement came from Gaius Gracchus and his turbulent tribuneship. As part of his reform package, Gaius Gracchus included a stipulation which “gave the Italians equal suffrage rights with Roman citizens.”¹²⁷ Unfortunately for the

¹²⁵ Konrad, “From the Gracchi to the First Civil War,” 170.

¹²⁶ Konrad, “From the Gracchi to the First Civil War,” 170.

¹²⁷ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Gracchus* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1921), 5.2.

Italian allies, this part of the reform package would crash and burn once Gaius Gracchus was murdered in an act of political violence previously described. While the violent opposition towards Gaius Gracchus was not purely a result of this Italian suffrage clause, it conveyed how Roman politicians were already willing to invoke political violence in reaction to an attempt at expanded citizenship.

Further attempts for Italian suffrage would not be seen until 97 BCE. In this year, the censors M. Antonius and L. Valerius Flaccus began enrolling more Italian elites into the ranks of the Roman citizenry.¹²⁸ This was actually the first successful step towards Italian suffrage, but even this small step was almost immediately undone. In 95 BCE, a court was established with the purpose of verifying the citizenship of Romans and the expressed intent of stripping this citizenship from the Italian allies who had just recently been granted this status.¹²⁹ In only two years, all the progress which had been made towards the suffrage of the Italian allies via the nonviolent institutions of the Roman Republic had been completely reversed.

The final example of a nonviolent attempt at Italian suffrage before the outbreak of the Social War, came from the tribune Marcus Livius Drusus in 91 BCE. Drusus planned to pass a bill which would achieve Italian enfranchisement by using all the tools of the nonviolent republican systems. While H. H. Scullard casts doubts on the intellect of Drusus, he nonetheless claims that, with regards to this bill, “his aims were the aims of a statesman.”¹³⁰ This bill gave all Italian allies citizenship, added three hundred new members to the Senate from the equestrian class, promised the plebeians new colonies in Italy and

¹²⁸ Konrad, “From the Gracchi to the First Civil War,” 177.

¹²⁹ Konrad, “From the Gracchi to the First Civil War,” 177.

¹³⁰ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 54.

Sicily, and decreed that juries were to be selected from the Senate instead of the equestrian class.¹³¹ The plebeians were pleased with the promise of new colonies, but the Senate, the equestrians, and even the Italian allies came to detest the proposal.¹³² The Senate did not like the idea of a vastly expanded aristocracy, the equestrians did not want to give up their monopoly over the law courts, and the Italian allies were displeased with the idea of setting up more Roman colonies. The result of this was that “both the Senate and the [equestrians], although opposed to each other, were united in hating Drusus.”¹³³

While the bill saw some initial success, hope for it died once one of its supporters, L. Crassus, died.¹³⁴ Rather than compromise creating a bill which all could support, it received almost unanimous disapproval. The failure of this legislation was the spark for the Social War. Livy claims that “for these reasons, Livius Drusus became hated even in the Senate, as if he had been the cause of the Social War, and he was assassinated by an unknown person in his own house.”¹³⁵ Drusus’ career as tribune had been so disastrous, that he was assassinated for his own failures. After this, a coalition of Italian allies decided that the only way to secure their political enfranchisement would be through political violence. They thus engaged in open war upon the Roman Republic.¹³⁶

Drusus’ failure is essential to understanding the state of politics in Rome. Scullard attributes much of Drusus’ failure to the fact that “he may not have shown great wisdom in his methods, which combined with his proud manner may have aroused fears that he was

¹³¹ Konrad, “From the Gracchi to the First Civil War,” 177.

¹³² Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, V.36.

¹³³ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, V.36.

¹³⁴ Konrad, “From the Gracchi to the First Civil War,” 178.

¹³⁵ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, Book 71.4.

¹³⁶ Konrad, “From the Gracchi to the First Civil War,” 178.

seeking too much personal power.”¹³⁷ Scullard is partially correct here, as Drusus’ methods were indeed flawed, though not from a lack of wisdom or personal defect. Rather, Drusus was attempting social reform by the archaic means of the Roman Republic, specifically through the application of political compromise. Drusus’ reforms did not succeed because he was attempting to create social change via a process which was nothing short of the vestigial remains of a defunct, nonviolent system in a new order where political violence was the primary method for social reform. Drusus’ miscalculation even resulted in his own violent end. It is a tragic irony that Drusus, a man who was committed to reform along nonviolent lines, would fall victim to political violence himself.

Drusus’ inability to pass his legislation is a testament to the failure of the old Roman Republic. The story of Drusus is most damning because it perfectly encapsulated how the Republic itself had become dependent on political violence to resolve its most contentious issues. It had not only become a more popular strategy than compromise, but it had also reflected on how obsolete the traditional Roman systems were. The failure and assassination of Drusus represented how there was no turning back from political violence, as it was simply far too effective, necessary, and integrated into Roman society. This catastrophe points towards a question which had come to consume the Roman Republic. In a landscape where a politician can unilaterally pass their entire agenda via political violence, how could anyone choose compromise?

Outbreak of the Social War

¹³⁷ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 54.

After decades of failed political reform (125-91 BCE), a coalition of Italian communities settled on a policy of political violence to achieve their rights. What must be placed under special emphasis is the juxtaposition between the utter failure experienced when trying to legislate Italian enfranchisement and the rapid success of achieving Italian enfranchisement once these communities resorted to political violence.

After Drusus' bill collapsed, an Italian coalition declared war on Rome. Appian gives a list of the initial participants in the war, which included "the Marsi, the Peligni, the Vestini, the Marrucini; and after them the Picentines, the Frentani, the Hirpini, the Pompeians, the Venusini, the Apulians, the Lucanians, and the Samnites."¹³⁸ The war lasted from 91-87 BCE. The Italian rebels formed their own confederacy called Italia and attempted to use their armies to break Roman hegemony over its empire.¹³⁹ Not only this, but the Italian allies also founded a capital at Corfinium, set up their own republican government, enrolled up to 100,000 soldiers and even minted their own coinage depicting the Italian bull goring the Roman wolf.¹⁴⁰ This war took several years to end, with prominent commanders such as Sulla and Marius both commanding armies throughout its duration.¹⁴¹ It was a time of great crisis in Rome, with the Senate at one point decreeing that "those who were killed in war should be buried where they fell, lest others should be deterred by the spectacle from entering the army."¹⁴² This was a war which saw tens of thousands killed on both sides and was the first time since Hannibal that war and massacre had been brought onto Rome's shores.

¹³⁸ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, V.39.

¹³⁹ Konrad, "From the Gracchi to the First Civil War," 178.

¹⁴⁰ Boatwright, *The Romans*, 172-173.

¹⁴¹ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 33.1; Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1916), 6.2.

¹⁴² Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, V.43.

This was not the first occasion open revolt was wielded for political action. Rome had already seen two separate occasions of these in the form of mass slave revolts known as the Servile Wars.¹⁴³ These uprisings were the result of discontent in the Roman order and the mistreatment of their inhabitants. The Social War represents a continuity of this trend, with the Italian Confederacy employing a similar method of violent militaristic revolt against the Roman government.

The pivotal moment came in 90 BCE when consul Lucius Julius Caesar passed the radical *lex Iulia*. This bill gave Roman citizenship to any Italian ally who surrendered their arms or chose to remain loyal.”¹⁴⁴ Not only this, but Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo, the consul of 89 BCE, passed a law which gave Latin rights to the peoples north of the Po River.¹⁴⁵ This bill led to an immensely bolstered count of Roman citizens under its government and increased the status of all inhabitants in the Italian Peninsula. These were emergency legislative actions necessitated by the violence which had enveloped the country.

The lesson displayed by these actions cannot be understated. Historians often have focused on the effect of this bill. Mouritsen argues that its passing led to “the wholesale incorporation of the Italians into the Roman state.”¹⁴⁶ Scullard writes that “Rome now made it possible for all to belong to a single society.”¹⁴⁷ The makeup of the Roman body had fundamentally changed due to the Social War.

While these effects are most certainly important, they miss one crucial factor which ties the Social War back to the instrumentalization of political violence. The reform for

¹⁴³ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 12, 45-46.

¹⁴⁴ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 57.

¹⁴⁵ Konrad, “From the Gracchi to the First Civil War,” 178.

¹⁴⁶ Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 171.

¹⁴⁷ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 58.

Italian citizenship which had failed for decades under the standard systems of local republican politics, was accomplished in a few months through political violence: the hallmark instrument of the Imperial Republic. The choice to embrace political violence reflected the frustrated politics and failed social reform encountered by the Gracchi. The difference between the politics of compromise and the politics of violence were astronomical. The failings of Rome's old republicanism were immediately rectified with political violence.

To best highlight this immense difference, compare Drusus' failure to the success of the Social War. Drusus is portrayed by Scullard as a failed politician, one who "had fallen between two stools" of popularism and aristocratic appeal.¹⁴⁸ His failure was further highlighted by the dramatic success which was brought on by the Social War's implementation of political violence. The message here is clear; not only were the politics of compromise dysfunctional, but they had also been entirely replaced with the policy of organized, legitimized political violence. The Social War put on full display just how essential and useful political violence had become in pushing through political agendas. The fact that the Romans granted the Italian allies' full citizenship so quickly the war broke out – less than a year later- signifies how the Romans had reached a point of only responding to political violence, the true staple instrument of the Imperial Republic.

In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Drusus is referred to as a "faded reflection of the Gracchi (*Graccum nitorem obsoletum*)."¹⁴⁹ This description is surprisingly apt, for a comparison between the politicians demonstrates the failings in the Roman government. Both

¹⁴⁸ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 53.

¹⁴⁹ Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium Book IV* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1954), 34.46.

the Gracchi and Drusus tribunes introducing legislation to address the serious social issues of their time. All three faced significant obstacles from their opposition and were met with violent ends, but the difference lies with the methodology. The Gracchi saw significantly more success in passing legislation to address the issues of their time, whereas the legacy of Drusus is exclusively failure and death. Drusus is a pale reflection of the Gracchi precisely because he did not resort to their tactics to pass legislation. In refusing to utilize violence in order to pass his legislation, Drusus doomed himself to fail where the Gracchi succeeded.

Once more, violence, its escalation, and further integration into the Imperial Republic was the primary solution to governmental failure. The previous chapters discussed Rome failing to meet the demands of its citizens and the ambitions of its politicians, but this demonstrates the inability for the city-state government to address the issues regarding its imperial inhabitants. Only through violence were the Italian demands actually granted proper attention. To the Italians, violence was the tool of enfranchisement, the Imperial Republic's cure for the city-state republic's ineffectualness. The reliance on violence was necessary only because it alone possessed the power to spark real change in the Roman order.

The Civil War Nature of the Social War

Part of the reason this political violence possessed such efficacy was found in its evolutionary nature. Quite simply, while the Italian allies were building upon the systems of political violence displayed in the previous decades, they chose to advance it a step further by introducing actual formalized armies into the fray. The Italian allies brought political violence from merely armed, professionalized gangs in the Forum, to real armies and open warfare across the peninsula. The Italian allies made use of a military alliance system to unite in opposition against Rome. This evolution of violence significantly increased the potential

scale for political violence on the Roman stage, which, in the coming decades, would prove to have dire consequences. The Italian allies created their own armies of cavalry and footmen, paid them with unique Italian coinage, and even set about creating platoons of soldiers to guard every town.¹⁵⁰ What was being displayed was a total mobilization of the Italian rebels. This event matters in the timeline of the Late Roman Republic as it introduced what would become the staple of Roman political violence in the first century BCE: the civil war.

The Social War represents a unique conflict in how it can be considered both a civil war and not a civil war. For example, when describing the trajectory of the Late Republic, Mary Beard describes how the first century BCE began with twenty years of sporadic civil wars and uprisings which all began with the Social War's example.¹⁵¹ This description gets at the heart of the Social War, for it can be described as both a political uprising, and a civil war.

Whether or not the Social War is specifically categorized as a civil war or a rebellion, one element must be emphasized: the implementation of war for political goals at Rome. The Social War was not some ramshackle upheaval; rather, it was a highly organized and standardized engagement of open warfare between troops backed by a state – however nascent the Italian government was. The impetus for war was explicitly political, and one of its chief results were the enfranchisement of the Italians and the militarization of political violence. The blurring of military command and domestic policy via political violence begun by Marius' actions were further realized by the Italian allies. Now, not only were veterans a

¹⁵⁰ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, V.39.

¹⁵¹ Beard, *SPQR*, 217.

tool for political violence, but the military itself had become an option for the expression of political violence. This effectively bridged the deliberately separated world of the military and domestic politics.

The escalation wrought by the Social War has not always been appreciated by modern scholars. When describing the significance of the Social War, Mouritsen asserts:

The crucial transition from political violence to civil war was...due to a coincidence of exceptional, unrelated factors; the fact that a major war against foreign enemies was being fought directly on Rome's doorstep offered unprecedented opportunities for generals to grab power. More specifically, it allowed the rivalry between Marius and Sulla to be taken to an entirely new level.¹⁵²

Mouritsen is partially correct in the claim that the Social War provided Sulla with the means to execute a full civil war in Rome, but his assertion that this was a series of coincidental, unrelated factors is not entirely accurate. The Social War was made possible by an increasing reliance on violence to settle contentious issues. It was the response to four failed decades of social reform and the actions of the Italian rebels clearly mark a continuation of the pattern of utilizing political violence to achieve an agenda. Since the Gracchi, political violence had only increased in its scope and scale, and the Social War represents the next link in this chain of escalation. Furthermore, the Roman Republic had already signaled via the example of the Gracchi and Marius that violence was the chief mode by which change could occur. The Social War is the result of the Italian allies internalizing the message of the Imperial Republic. The nonviolent, traditional institutions had failed, and political violence was the solution to this issue. Because of this, it is not accurate to claim that the backdrop for later civil wars was some series of random and coincidental events.

¹⁵² Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 171.

Conclusion

Overall, the Social War demonstrates the continual shift of Roman politics towards relying on its vehicle of political violence. It is expansion of the scope with which political violence could be executed allowed for civil war to become a staple of the Late Roman Republic. The Social War represented the shift towards mobilizing the full force of military for political purposes. Not only this, but the Social War also made clear how violence had become a necessity for the Republic's function. The war of the Italian allies was the only action with the potency get the Imperial Republic to address their concerns. Violence had shifted to being such a staple, that it became the vehicle through which social demands were heard. Sulla would complete the shift towards increased violence and escalate the instrument to such a degree, that his violence could be accurately described as both political expression and civilian massacre.

Chapter 4: Violence Unleashed

In 88 BCE, Lucius Cornelius Sulla Felix, a Roman consul, chose to march his army into the city of Rome and engage in the first true civil war of the Late Roman Republic. By the end of the decade, Sulla “would take vengeance by strong measures on the praetors, quaestors, military tribunes, and everybody else who had committed any hostile act” against him.¹⁵³ This decade would witness multiple civil wars and the full unleashing of political violence upon the Roman citizenry.

Sulla’s actions represented the culmination of political violence in the Roman Republic. The politics of rivalry made violent by the actions of Marius and Sulpicius led Sulla to choose civil war and cemented the Imperial Republic’s dependency on violence. Sulla brought to Rome the most extreme form of violence the Republic had yet seen, and it was utilized to devastating effect. Sulla’s civil war was a novel escalation of violence and yet the result of the previous decades of Rome’s violent evolution of its politics.

The Prelude to War

The political backdrop to Sulla’s first march on Rome shed light on the social pressures and expressions of violence which facilitated and seemingly necessitated his actions. One of the principal authors of this crisis was the tribune Publius Sulpicius. Plutarch gives a less than flattering depiction of the tribune and goes as far to describe Sulpicius as “a man second to none in prime villainies, so that the question was not whom else he surpassed

¹⁵³ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, XI.95.

in wickedness, but in what he surpassed his own wickedness.”¹⁵⁴ Be this as it may, Sulpicius’ actions were emblematic of the larger trends of political violence in Rome.

The trouble began with a bill. According to Appian, Sulpicius, “encouraged the new Italian citizens, who had very little power in the elections, to hope that they should be distributed among all the tribes...with the expectation of employing them as loyal servants for all his ends” and had “brought forward a law for this purpose.”¹⁵⁵ The goal Sulpicius’ bill was to fulfill this ambition.

Drawing upon the precedent of me like Saturninus before him, Sulpicius had no qualms on the casual implementation of political violence to pass his bill. Plutarch writes that he already “maintained three thousand swordsmen, and had about him a body of young men of the equestrian order who were ready for everything, and whom he called his anti-senate.”¹⁵⁶ Having a permanent standing gang was not only a mark of open hostility, but reflected just how prominent such violence had become. Sulpicius went even further, however, and made an alliance with Marius in a manner akin to Marius’ alliance with Saturninus. Specifically, Marius would supply Sulpicius with his loyal veterans to force through legislation. In turn, Sulpicius would confer the Mithridatic campaign (originally designated to the current consul Sulla) to Marius, who hoped to reclaim some of his earlier glory through war.¹⁵⁷

With this alliance set, Sulpicius went forward to violently pass his bill by “confounding all things by force and the sword.”¹⁵⁸ The consuls Sulla and Pompeius Rufus

¹⁵⁴ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 8.1.

¹⁵⁵ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, VII.55.

¹⁵⁶ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 8.2.

¹⁵⁷ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 59.

¹⁵⁸ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 8.2.

attempted to stop the legislation, but they were repelled by the assault of Sulpicius' forces.¹⁵⁹ According to Plutarch, the violence was of such a fervor, Sulla was forced to take refuge in Marius' house and rescind all opposition.¹⁶⁰ Already as consul, Sulla witnessed firsthand how powerless he was against yet another one of Marius' violent alliances. Not even the solidified opposition of both consuls could come anywhere close to overcoming the power of political violence.

The real damage was yet to come, as the second half of Marius and Sulpicius' deal came to fruition. After the chaotic fray at the forum, Sulpicius "deposed Pompeius" (the other consul) and "transferred the expedition against Mithridates to the command of Marius. He also sent military tribunes at once to Nola, who were to take over the army there and conduct it to Marius."¹⁶¹ Once again, Marius was using a tribunate alliance to push through a particular agenda and dishonor his rivals. This new violent alliance was flexing its political might by deposing a consul, violently forcing through legislation, and forcibly removing another consul's military command. The instrumentalization of political violence had grown to the point where it could effectively overturn all the other facets of the Roman government.

The Necessity of Civil War

It was in this situation that Sulla decided to take his army at Nola and march it against Rome itself, declare Marius and his allies public enemies, and forcefully reestablish himself as the Mithridatic commander.¹⁶² To many scholars, to incite such a civil war was "unprecedented." For example, when discussing Sulla's first march, Watts states, "It was the

¹⁵⁹ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 8.3.

¹⁶⁰ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 8.4.

¹⁶¹ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 8.4.

¹⁶² Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 59.

first time in over four hundred years that a Roman army had taken the lives and destroyed the property of other Romans.”¹⁶³ While Watts may be correct in the technical novel nature of Sulla’s actions, it is not entirely accurate to label them wholesale as unprecedented. While Sulla’s first march on Rome may appear to be a completely unexpected development in the Late Roman Republic, it actually represented the escalation of violence. As a dialectic, political violence continued to build off its previous examples until it resulted in the violation of the Republic’s sacred norms. By marching his army into the *pomerium*, Sulla shattered one of the final remaining tenants of the *mos maiorum*. In fact, Sulla’s march on Rome was a culmination of the lessons of the Gracchi, the alliance among Marius, Glaucia, and Saturninus, and even the Social War. If anything, the novelty of Sulla was in how these factors had yet to be joined into a single conflict.

First, Sulla was set in direct opposition to the power of Marius’ violent alliance, the efficacy of which had already been demonstrated by the union of Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia. Additionally, Sulla had already entirely lost a political battle to Marius and Sulpicius in the Forum. Quite simply, Sulla was tasked with trying to overthrow an adversary who could not be beaten via the standard, nonviolent systems of the Roman Republic. The same republic which failed to fulfill Marius’ ambitions without violence, now provided no peaceful alternative to the situation Sulla found himself in.

This was not the first time a problem of this kind had been observed, as Nasicus and his gang of senators were exposed to a similar dilemma. When Tiberius absorbed various senatorial powers, ran for reelection, and deposed his enemies (with the aid of political

¹⁶³ Watts, *Mortal Republic*, 136.

violence), it appeared that he could not be overcome by any of the traditional republican institutions. Nasica ultimately recognized that the most effective way to defeat Tiberius Gracchus was to meet the tribune with a separate, more powerful application of violence. Just a few years later, this legally sanctioned impetus to violence had even been codified in the *Senatus Consultum Ultimum* against Gaius.

If Sulla wished to not have his career ruined by Marius' alliance, he would have to follow the example of Nasica and use political violence. In fact, in a moment that strikingly parallels Nasica, when embassies asked Sulla three times why he was marching on Rome, he reportedly said, "To deliver her from tyrants."¹⁶⁴ Sulla's first civil war was seen by him as a justifiable march against tyrants, the necessity of which was a result of what he believed to be Rome's institutional failure. There was no other measure with the capacity to defeat his political opponents, now holding the tyrannical threat of a new violent alliance against him.

Sulla's response also reflects the reality of the Imperial Republic. The original institutions designed for conflict resolution were meant for managing aristocratic tensions within a local city. Rome's republican government was not equipped for rivalries utilizing the full might of imperial armies and wealth built up by a Mediterranean empire. Where these institutions stalled, increasingly violent tactics succeeded.

This is where the Social War comes into play, for it provided the precedent needed for Sulla's actions. The Social War saw the first total mobilization of professional armies solely for the purpose of political violence. Not only had the Social War incorporated the military machine into the practices of political violence, but it also displayed just how potent

¹⁶⁴ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, VII.57.

such a strong threat could be. This event and its aftermath created the environment in which Sulla could conceivably use his army at Nola for the explicit reason of political violence.

All these previous events in Late Republican history converge in their teachings and precedents to engender the Roman Republic's first true civil war. Sulla's actions were not a kneejerk escalation or an event of random chance. His civil war was the result of Rome's steadily and consistently expanding utilization of political violence to solve the failings of its republican institutions. Its causes, motivations, and means of implementation all drew from earlier cases of political violence. The rivalry between generals for campaigns and honors had always existed in Rome, but now these contentious competitions were given the option to be resolved with militaristic political violence. Sulla's civil war is also remarkable in the degree to which it expanded the Roman scope and capacity of political violence. Setting a precedent for real civil war did forever change the Roman Republic, but this step was only possible because of the rapid expansion of political violence which had occurred over the previous five decades.

The historiography of Sulla's march has come under scrutiny in modern times.¹⁶⁵ The archaic notion that Sulla's march was justified based upon the corruption of the sitting aristocrats no longer suffices, and this has led into a reinvigorated evaluation on the warrant for Sulla's actions. While this question is important, this thesis is more concerned with how his actions represented a larger trend in political violence towards militaristic conflict. Sulla's actions were justifiable on the grounds of how political violence escalated to a point which rendered civil war as the premier viable option to resolve the conflict Sulla was facing.

¹⁶⁵ E. Badian, "Waiting for Sulla," *The Journal of Roman Studies* Vol. 52, Parts 1 and 2 (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1962), 47.

The Lessons of Civil War

Sulla's gamble on expanding the scope of Roman political violence paid off; his first march resulted in his complete, albeit temporary, victory. Marius and his family "fled at once out of the city, together with those of the nobility who had co-operated with them"; Sulpicius was found and killed.¹⁶⁶ After this, Sulla sought to pass some brief reforms with the hope of curbing the potential for further political violence. According to Appian, Sulla and his political supporters "thought that by these two measures — namely, that no law should be brought before the people unless it had been previously before the Senate, and that the voting should be controlled by the well-to-do and sober-minded rather than by the pauper and reckless classes — there would no longer be left any starting-point for civil discord."¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, Sulla expanded the Senate and curtailed the influence of the tribunate with the same goal of rescuing the republic against which he had just violently laid siege. Like the Gracchi and Nasica, Sulla viewed his civil war as an emergency act of desperation, implemented solely due to the complete lack of alternatives. Though he enacted civil war, the violence he resorted to was sparing for the most part.

Unfortunately, Sulla's first march on Rome was a clear demonstration of the capacity of this new expression of political violence. His civil war resulted in the absolute expulsion of his enemies, the restoration of his command, the annulment of his opponents' legislative measures, an overhaul in the composition of the Senate, and a small restructuring of republican systems. Violence's capacity to shatter gridlock, tyranny, and opposition was once more on full display. Sulla passed all these measures with minimal backlash which was

¹⁶⁶ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, VII.58.

¹⁶⁷ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, VII.59.

directly because of his army's influence. Additionally, as viewed with all the previous examples of political violence, its efficacy caused the tool to expand through civil war. Not only this, but Sulla also quite literally presented his enemies with a form of political violence which could overthrow all political opposition and force through any agenda.

Nevertheless, confident even with one of the elected consuls, Lucius Cornelius Cinna, starkly opposed to him, Sulla decided to leave Rome so he could pursue his Mithridatic campaign.¹⁶⁸ In other words, Sulla showcased the most effective form of political domination, let his opponents take office, and then abandoned the city with nothing more than an oath from these enemies that they would not go against him. A second civil war was almost guaranteed, and Sulla would not make the mistake of mercy again. The tragedy here is how Rome had become so entirely reliant on political violence, that an attempt to show clemency and create effective legislation to curb violence only resulted in more violence. The dialectical nature of political violence encouraged its continued implementation. Political violence had become as integral as it was dangerous.

The immediate cause of Sulla's second civil war was Cinna's alliance with Marius after he had been cast out of office by his rival consul.¹⁶⁹ The pair violently forced their way into Rome while Sulla was gone. Plutarch gives a particularly chilling account, claiming that Marius "made it clear all the while, by the heaviness of his countenance and the gloominess of his look, that he would at once fill the city with slaughter."¹⁷⁰ Marius had his men enter the city and unleash the full force of political violence on its citizens. As Plutarch describes:

¹⁶⁸ Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 60-61.

¹⁶⁹ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 41.

¹⁷⁰ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 43.

So many were slain that at last Cinna's appetite for murder was dulled and sated; but Marius, whose anger increased day by day and thirsted for blood, kept on killing all whom he held in any suspicion whatsoever. Every road and every city was filled with men pursuing and hunting down those who sought to escape or had hidden themselves.¹⁷¹

Eventually the violence was ended, but this required another use of violence, with Cinna and his men killing the more bloodthirsty Marian soldiers.¹⁷²

Both Sulla and Marius utilized civil war and professional armies as a means to achieve political supremacy, but it was Marius who first demonstrated just how far this evolution of violence could be taken. In massacring his opposition, Marius took this tool to its most extreme, and effective form. The violence Marius displayed was not the emergency last resort maneuver Sulla had done, but his first course of action upon returning. Exactly like in gang violence, Marius took a practice which was originally a dangerous, emergency measure, and transformed it into the standard procedure of operation. Sulla would learn from this and, as he emerged as victor in the second civil war, he would make liberal use of newly institutionalized political violence via citizen slaughter.

The second civil war Sulla fought was far more akin to a standard civil war. This war saw sides with multiple armies fight battles across Italy and, large-scale campaigns occurring from Mount Tifatum, to Fidentia, to even the Colline Gate.¹⁷³ The war lasted from 83 to 81 BCE, but fighting in Iberia did not end until a full decade later with the assassination of the final Marian, Quintus Sertorius.¹⁷⁴ This civil war was an expression of political violence, but it was also indistinguishable from the standard methods of warfare: the sieging of cities,

¹⁷¹ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 43.

¹⁷² Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 44.

¹⁷³ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 27.5-7; Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, VII.58.

¹⁷⁴ Plutarch, *The Life of Sertorius* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1919), 27.3.

pitched battles, and even the sacking of the capital city. Political violence had come to fully integrate the systems of the Roman military into its potential modes of expression.

Codified Carnage

After soundly defeating all of Cinna's armies - Marius had previously died of old age - Sulla once more marched his army into Rome. This time, however, he followed the violent example of Marius.¹⁷⁵ It began when a delegation of three thousand city inhabitants came to Sulla begging for mercy. Plutarch writes that Sulla "promised them safety if they would do some mischief...So, they, trusting to his promise, attacked the rest of the people in the city, and many were slain by one another's hands."¹⁷⁶ Plutarch details the further spread of the slaughter:

Survivors of both parties alike, to the number of six thousand, were collected by Sulla in the circus at Rome, and then the senate was summoned by him to meet in the temple of Bellona, and at one and the same moment he himself began to speak in the senate, and those assigned to the task began to cut to pieces the six thousand in the circus. The shrieks of such a multitude, who were being massacred in a narrow space, filled the air, of course, and the senators were dumbfounded; but Sulla, with the calm and unmoved countenance with which he had begun to speak, ordered them to listen to his words and not concern themselves with what was going on outside, for it was only that some criminals were being admonished, by his orders.¹⁷⁷

This section has been quoted in full because it perfectly conveys the horror of institutionalized political violence once its final restraints were cut loose. Sulla's circus massacre was both an act of brilliantly terrifying political theater and a means for effectively ending all possible political opposition.

¹⁷⁵ Boatwright, *The Romans*, 183.

¹⁷⁶ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 30.2.

¹⁷⁷ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 30.2-3.

In all the previous examples of political violence, the perpetrators of such violence - the Gracchi, Nasica, Saturninus, Glaucia, Marius - rarely held onto the political capital gained from their violence. This is because either internal dissention destroyed the capacity for political violence or external forces utilized a more forceful form of violence to kill said people. The point is, political violence, while effective, traditionally could only be relied upon for so long.

Sulla's second civil war solved both problems, thus perfecting the institution of political violence with a policy of tyranny and liquidation. He dealt with the issue of internal dissention crumbling violent alliances by assuming the sole power to order political violence himself. In a move of utter political domination, Sulla "became dictator for life by force and compulsion."¹⁷⁸ This placed Sulla in charge of all actions of political violence. Unlike Marius, Sulla did not need to rely on the assistance of anyone other than his devoutly loyal soldiers. Sulla could have no breakdown in his violent political order because he *was* the entire political order.

Having thus secured himself from the possibility of internal political violence being leveraged against him, he next aimed at fully stripping his opponents in the name of securing his own safety and *dignitas*. The institution of violence would allow Sulla to accomplish this with relative ease. Because an act of political violence could only be overcome by a more powerful/violent expression of the same institution, Sulla simply went to the extremes of what this institution could offer. That is to say, Sulla unleashed a violence which could not be matched by any force and, in doing so, Sulla secured his total supremacy over Rome itself.

¹⁷⁸ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, 1.3.

Sulla pushed the institution of political violence to a size and scale unthinkable: the legalized and mandated butchering of civilians through proscriptions.

A proscription involved having a person's name placed on a list and displayed to the public. This person was then marked for death and could be killed with impunity. Not only that, but the killer would also receive a portion of the victim's wealth with the rest going to the state.¹⁷⁹ Plutarch describes the beginning of the proscription process:

Sulla at once proscribed eighty persons, without communicating with any magistrate; and in spite of the general indignation, after a single day's interval, he proscribed two hundred and twenty others, and then on the third day, as many more. Referring to these measures in a public harangue, he said that he was proscribing as many as he could remember, and those who now escaped his memory, he would proscribe at a future time.¹⁸⁰

These proscriptions incorporated every inhabitant of Rome into the institution of political violence. Not only did Sulla proscribe his enemies, but “he also proscribed anyone who harbored and saved a proscribed person, making death the punishment for such humanity, without exception of brother, son, or parents.”¹⁸¹ Not only did the proscriptions provide incentives for people to murder their civilian neighbors, family, or friends, but it went as far to punish those who were merciful. In doing this, Sulla not only secured total political supremacy, but also wiped out all current and potential future opposition. Sulla's proscriptions ensured there could be no power in Rome with any potency at challenging his agenda.

¹⁷⁹ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 31.4.

¹⁸⁰ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 31.3.

¹⁸¹ Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 31.4.

This act also made political violence so widespread, so ingrained into Roman society, that it went out of its way to punish those who refused to participate in it. Political violence transcended the institutions of even family and patronage - institutions which were once of paramount to Rome. They were not only legitimized, but legally ordained public civilian bounty hunting. Political violence had now come to engulf every aspect of Rome, and the carnage wrought by this codified and legalized practice, alongside Sulla's previous massacres killed thousands.¹⁸² During the proscriptions, violence became Roman society.

This was the final form of political violence in Rome, as it simply could not expand any further. There could be no greater use of violence to overcome this one, for it was a violence which held a death grip on all aspects of Roman society. The sacred bonds of family and fellowship were entirely shattered in this practice, and it thoroughly demonstrated the efficacy of violence to overcome all other hinderances and failures. After his first march on Rome, Sulla withheld further violence in an attempt to keep Rome off the path of relying on such an institution. The result of this was the immediate resurgence of his enemies, the murdering of his friends in the capital while he was away, and a civil war which encompassed the Italian peninsula necessitating a second march on Rome. With Sulla's second march, the mistake of believing the Roman Republic could function without political slaughter was not made again, and the results of the proscriptions were phenomenal for Sulla.

Sulla had found a way to establish peace in the Roman Republic. Unfortunately for Rome, the reliance on political violence meant that such a peace could only be made possible via an intensely grotesque application of massacre. In unleashing the proscriptions, Sulla

¹⁸² Plutarch, *The Life of Sulla*, 30.2.

became the sole master of Rome's now most effective institution, and he formally legalized its supremacy over all other aspects of Roman society. Rome had completed its transition into a republic of violence.

Even so, we should be careful in characterizing Sulla as the sole destroyer of the Roman Republic. Watts even describes the chapter regarding Sulla's march as "The Republic Breaks," but this is not entirely accurate.¹⁸³ It is true that Sulla effectively killed the final remains of Rome's previous manners of conflict resolution, but he did not quite so simply break the Republic. Instead, Sulla set out the final tenants of a new republic which implemented violence as a standard, codified, and legal measure for conflict resolution and political gain. Sulla did not kill the Roman Republic; rather, it had been slowly shifting over the last several decades. Sulla completed this transformation into its new form: a reorganization of politics with the institution of violence as its chief instrument.

Reform in the Aftermath

After the proscriptions had concluded, Sulla set about creating his perfected Roman Republic. Despite being the chief benefactor from political violence, Sulla sought to design a system which would eliminate it as a factor from Roman governance. Watts provides a summary of these reforms:

[Sulla] forbade anybody to hold the office of praetor until after he had held that of quaestor, or to be consul before he had been praetor, and he prohibited any man from holding the same office a second time till after the lapse of ten years. He reduced the tribunician power to such an extent that it seemed to be destroyed. He curtailed it by a law which provided that one holding the office of tribune should never afterward hold any other office.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Watts, *Mortal Republic*, 119.

¹⁸⁴ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, XI.100.

With regards to the Senate, Sulla expanded it with “he added about 300 new members.”¹⁸⁵ He also enrolled as Roman citizens over 10,000 slaves previously owned by proscribed individuals. These actions, combined with the reforms after his first march on Rome, created a Roman Republic which would ideally no longer be reliant on political violence. Sulla’s reforms failed, however, and Rome would find itself in the exact same patterns of violence after his death.

There is a plethora of theories as to why Sulla’s reforms ultimately failed. Mouritsen makes the argument that Sulla’s tribunate reforms failed in part because “the tribunate presented an insuperable conundrum, being both disruptive and indispensable.”¹⁸⁶ In other words, these reforms attempted to dismantle the power of an overtly necessary institution to the functioning of the Republic.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, Mouritsen points out how Sulla’s reforms were just downright unpopular, as they were “most likely considered a step too far, and one which carried painful associations of tyranny and civil war.”¹⁸⁸

These arguments solve why the reforms themselves were dismantled, but not why this attempt at a peaceful republic failed entirely. Quite simply, there was an irreconcilable division between Sulla’s overtures towards the idea of a peaceful republic, and the carnage which he implemented to reach this point. Using exclusively the institution of political violence, Sulla secured total control over Rome, ensured he would never face any future opposition, greatly enriched himself and his allies, and reshaped the fundamentals of the

¹⁸⁵ Appian, *The Civil Wars Book I*, XI.100.

¹⁸⁶ Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 147.

¹⁸⁷ Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 147.

¹⁸⁸ Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 147.

Roman Republic. Sulla claimed that he wanted to create a peaceful republic, but he had just sent a message to every Roman politician on the near limitless power violence could bestow. Sulla guaranteed the return of political violence by perfectly displaying how it could be made to overpower every aspect of Rome's failing republicanism. A tool with such efficacy could only be banished from the Roman Republic for so long, for it was simply too useful to be ignored. In this sense, Sulla's reforms, no matter what they were, could not create a peaceful republic. Violence, with its capacity to defeat all obstacles, overpower the frustrations of Rome's tired, antiquated systems, force through any agenda, and ensure supremacy over the state, was Sulla's lasting effect. His perfection of this institution would not go unnoticed, and it would be brought forth again, until the violent republic was eventually done away with.

Conclusion

An anecdote regarding Pompey best encapsulates the results of Sulla's actions. During the proscriptions, Pompey was sent to deal with the Mamertines in Sicily. The Mamertines "declined his tribunal and jurisdiction on the plea that they were forbidden by an ancient law of the Romans, at which Pompey said: 'Cease quoting laws to us who are carrying swords!'"¹⁸⁹ Pompey's utterance is the triumph of violence over all other systems and may be justly employed as the maxim of Sulla and the Late Roman Republic as a whole. The laws of an inefficient, tired government could not compete with the force of arms. Sulla finalized the methods of violence by which the Republic would operate, and despite his best efforts, his actions ensured the political violence would be a mainstay.

¹⁸⁹ Plutarch, *The Life of Pompey* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1917), 10.2.

The continuity between the events highlighted both here and in the previous chapters cannot be overstated. Sulla, like Marius, Saturninus, Tiberius, Nasica, and the Italian rebels, utilized political violence as an antidote to the ineffective Roman institutions of governance. It was exclusively via civil war that Sulla was able to adequately manage his opposition and end his fierce rivalries. Chiefly through violence could Sulla counteract the alliance between Marius and Sulpicius, and violence was the primary instrument with the capacity to end Cinna's regime.

The escalation of violence over these decades occurred as more of Rome's domestic government proved ineffectual. Violence solved this issue. Rome was now wholly dependent on this tool to provide for the most contentious desires and ambitions of its citizens and politicians, as a means for social change, the realization of political aspirations, and the solving of political disputes. The expansion of violence, as explored earlier, was equally a result of its efficacy. Not only did violence confer immense political power, but the only method with the potential to overcome it was a greater use of violence. It would be imprudent to believe that these dysfunctional nonviolent methods, whose failure necessitated violence in the first place, would be able to overcome said violence.

The combination of these factors meant that political violence would continue to permeate itself throughout Rome's governing institutions, until it had invaded almost all aspects of Roman society. Civil war and the Sullan proscriptions are to be seen as the final evolution of codified, institutionalized political violence, for they involved the full aspects of Rome's empire and embedded the whole city of Rome in violence which expected participation from all its citizenry. Essentially, violence was the last remaining vehicle of true political power in Rome. It succeeded when all of Rome's traditional political methods had

failed, and the Roman politicians of the Republic consistently resorted to it precisely because only violence carried the sought-after effectiveness. While political violence was considered a problem, it was also the chief solution to Rome's issues. Political violence was not the problem of a failing republic, but the answer to its stalled, impotent systems. This is how, in the span of five decades, a peaceful republic of nearly 400 years became a republic of violence.

Conclusion

Julius Caesar is perhaps the most famous politician from the Roman Republic. His name carries power and meaning to this day; even the seventh month, July, is a reference to his name.¹⁹⁰ In America, though, his name is especially synonymous with tyranny and the death of republics; to call someone a “Caesar” would carry similar connotations to calling someone a *rex* or “king” in Republican Rome.¹⁹¹ The problem with this emphasis lies with the fact that the Republic’s degradation to violence occurred decades before Caesar was a factor. As such, the contemporary fear of some Caesar coming along and overthrowing a republic is misguided. The expansion of political violence in Republican Rome demonstrates how complex the destruction of a republic is, and how it cannot simply be broken down to the individual actions of a few politicians.

It is to revisit Machiavelli’s analysis on the tumults of the early to mid-Roman Republic. The powerful tools of political expression in Rome’s Republic had ceased to function properly in the era of the Imperial Republic. These institutions were successful when Rome was restricted to either the influence of its city or a regional area, but they saw drastically reduced potency when combined with the resources and burdens of empire. In short, the tumults bled into violence once the means for managing the interests of the Roman Republic’s citizenry failed to realign and reshape itself to the entirely different reality of empire. Rome survived with peace for those three hundred years because Rome itself

¹⁹⁰ Suetonius, *The Life of Julius Caesar* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1913), 76.1.

¹⁹¹ Tim Elliot, “America Is Eerily Retracing Rome’s Steps to a Fall. Will It Turn Around Before It’s Too Late?” *Politico*, November 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/11/03/donald-trump-julius-caesar-433956>

remained in a state which allowed its institutions and means for conflict resolution to have their desired effect.

From 133 BCE to 83 BCE, organized political violence went from an extraordinarily rare emergency measure reserved for protecting against tyranny, to the primary and supreme form of political conflict resolution. Its evolution began with the Gracchi and their assassins - the men driven to violence by the onset of perpetual political gridlock. More specifically, failures in the Roman systems of nonviolent conflict resolution led the Gracchi and their enemies to embrace a last resort of violence. Tiberius Gracchus demonstrated how violence could allow for both the accumulation of power (managing foreign affairs and fund allocation), and the entire removal of political opposition. After the traditional means of handling a politician like Tiberius Gracchus failed, Nasica and his associates chose to meet his violence with the only response powerful enough to overcome it: a greater violence. Not only this, but via the *Senatus Consultum Ultimum*, the Senate overtly legalized political violence and ingrained it as the primary emergency response.

These acts cemented the viability of political violence as a more potent alternative to traditional means of compromise. With this instrument established and its efficacy acknowledged, the next decades saw to its expansion and further legitimization. Marius, Glaucia, and Saturninus fully realized the potential for wielding gangs to achieve political gain and, in forming their alliance, created a system which was impossible to defeat without the aid of internal strife or civil war. Furthermore, the three implemented violence in nonemergency scenarios, which formed the next great addition to the scope of violence. Because of this, political violence went from an emergency tactic to something far more commonplace. This change effectively normalized violence as standard procedure for the

Republic. This move ensured that violence would be developed and ingrained even further, as politicians would make more and more use of it whenever beneficial. Violence allowed for total political victories without the need for compromise, which made it a naturally more attractive option for politicians seeking to carve out a steady influence in Rome.

The Social War brilliantly highlighted how the frustrating politics of compromise were antiquated in this new reality of gangs and armed conflict. The sheer difference between the continuous failed legislation to the immediate success of suffrage when violence was levied demonstrates the gulf of efficacy which existed between the two systems. Violence was proven to be the premier vehicle for legislating social change, which gave the tool even more prominence. The Social War also brought war into the formula for political violence. Professional armies serving under generals were now made a legitimate tool for political power.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Social War is in how it facilitated the outbreak of civil war. While Sulla became the first Roman of the late Roman Republic to engage in civil war through chance and circumstance, civil war being introduced to Rome was an inevitability. This is because the evolution of political violence – namely, its standardized implementation, its only external weakness being a more powerful form of violence, and the complete breakdown of traditional conflict resolution - guaranteed eventual escalation to civil war. Civil war was revealed as the greatest expression of political violence, as was its fallout violence: proscriptions. The effect of Sulla was the institutionalization and codification of political violence on the largest scale it could possibly exist. Sulla, by taking sole control of the Roman Republic, getting the citizenry to slaughter his enemies, and

entirely reforging the laws of the Republic, publicly showcased just how far political violence could go.

These five decades set the precedent for how political violence could be weaponized in the Roman Republic. In fact, the last five decades of the Roman Republic were simply a repetition on variations of these incidents. The Catilinarian Conspiracy was a failed attempt at armed insurrection with the intent on embroiling the Roman Republic in civil war. The frequent clashes between Publius Clodius Pulcher and Titus Annius Milo represent a similar form of gang violence perfected by Saturninus. The First Triumvirate followed upon the example of Marius, Glaucia, and Saturninus - specifically, how an alliance across magistrates combined with armed gangs allowed for republican domination. Even an alliance's weakness to internal dissention was mirrored and its dissolution into a civil war based upon Sulla's model. This cycle happened once more with the Second Triumvirate, except they also made use of Sulla's proscription methods. This cycle was only overcome when Augustus was placed in a situation which matched both Julius Caesar and Sulla's position, but he instead chose to dispose of the violent Republic altogether via more political savvy moves than his predecessors.

After the setting up of political violence as an effective instrument and institution in the first five decade of the Late Republic, the final decades simply applied all its doctrines until the Republic itself was destroyed. Even Cicero and Cato the Younger, the self-proclaimed protectors of the Roman Republic, could not adequately defend it from violence, nor could they even avoid using it themselves. When deciding what to do with the Catilinarian conspirators caught in Rome, it was Cato's speech which carried the day. He advocated that Roman citizens who had not been put on a formal trial "should be put to death

as if they had been caught in the actual commission of capital offences.”¹⁹² This speech swayed the Senate and, that same night, the consul Cicero executed the citizens without trial; even Lentulus - who had previously held consular authority – was killed.¹⁹³ Political violence had reached such an engrained level in Rome that its top defenders actively encouraged and oversaw the execution of citizens without trial. It is only natural that Cicero and Cato’s attempts for republicanism should be in vain, as violence had already become thoroughly embedded into the Roman government.

With all this in mind, it is useful to return to Polybius and his prediction of Rome’s fall. Polybius laid the Republic’s destruction on two interlocking factors: competition for honors and the influence of the masses. According to Polybius, “rivalry for office and in other spheres of activity will become fiercer than it should.”¹⁹⁴ Furthermore when it comes to who “will usher in a period of general deterioration,” Polybius writes that “the principal authors of this change will be the masses, who at some moments will believe that they have a grievance against the greed of other members of society, and at others are made conceited by the flattery of those who aspire to office.”¹⁹⁵ Polybius makes the even wilder claim that this would lead to a government “that is the rule of the mob.”¹⁹⁶ While the previous statements have at least some bearing in Rome’s future, Rome’s devolution into an ochlocracy is almost laughably incorrect. The argument of a social grievance among the masses driving the decline of Rome may sound eerily accurate, but when considering the institutions of Rome, this was almost guaranteed. The aristocratic Senate operated with the powers conferred by

¹⁹² Sallust, *The Conspiracy of Catiline* (London: The Penguin Group, 1963), 53.4.

¹⁹³ Sallust, *The Conspiracy of Catiline*, 55.6.

¹⁹⁴ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.57.

¹⁹⁵ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.57.

¹⁹⁶ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.57.

auctoritas and tradition, defending its privileges and wealth, while the tribunate, from its conception, was a tool designed to provide a legitimized channel for social unrest among the non-aristocratic. Many of its powers were designed specifically to force some compromise or change in the power balance of the orders. Tribunes were a fiery element to the Roman government because their civic duties inherently involved challenging the current social orders when some injustice was perceived.

Polybius' argument that competition for honors would result in violence can be observed specifically in the struggles between Marius and Sulla, and Pompey and Caesar. As explained previously, the competition for honors in the Mithridatic campaign drove them directly into civil war. However, a key point to consider is the fact that this occurred several decades after Rome had begun the shift towards internalizing political violence. The competition for honors was not the direct reason for the republic's fall to violence, but rather an arena which became dominated by violence after it had already been engrained into the political system. Overall, Polybius did recognize how an interplay between aristocratic tension and social unrest would fuel Rome's degeneration into violence, but his analytic failure rested more with his inability to see how the institutions he praised so highly could fail in their original duties. This skewed his perspective to instead blame the individual rather than institutional failure.

There is, however, an example offered by Polybius which far more closely matched that of Rome. When describing the constitution of Sparta, Rome's closest competitor for constitutional quality according to Polybius, the shortcomings of Sparta were blamed on its

designs as a city-state.¹⁹⁷ Its institutions would not allow it to function as a proper empire, as they were designed for the running of merely a city-state. This forced the Spartans to seek aid from their old enemy Persia when attempting to assert its imperial dominance.¹⁹⁸ Much the same can be said for Rome. The Roman government, the powers of the Tribune to create and resolve conflict, the facilitating and controlling of political ambitions, the powers conferred to the assemblies, and the *auctoritas* of the Senate, were all specifically employed for the sake of maintaining a city-state. These institutions failed to handle the social crises of empire, the expectations of imperial ambition, the resolution of internal conflicts, and the handling of non-citizen members of the empire precisely because the Roman Republic was not designed with this in mind. The powers of secession were only successful in the city-state republic (and even then, only as a defensive emergency measure), not in the Imperial Republic. The failure of republicanism in Rome was a direct result of its imperial gains fundamentally shifting the balance of power in Rome in a way that the city-state checks and balances could not adequately address. Much like Polybius' Sparta, Rome's government was not meant for empire.

While Julius Caesar is an important figure to discuss when analyzing the fall of the Roman Republic, the real poisoning of the Roman Republic took place well before this. By the time of the Caesars, violence was long established as integral to Roman politics. A famous aspect of Caesar's career was his insistence on clemency.¹⁹⁹ This policy was an overt attempt by Caesar to avoid a reliance on violence, and the result of this was his butchering by the very Senators he showed mercy to.²⁰⁰ Rome itself was a republic in which violence had

¹⁹⁷ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.49.

¹⁹⁸ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI.49.

¹⁹⁹ Suetonius, *The Life of Julius Caesar* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1913), 75.1-3.

²⁰⁰ Suetonius, *The Life of Julius Caesar*, 82.1-3.

become intrinsic to its existence. It was the primary vehicle for settling political disputes, advancing/derailing legislation, and advancing one's own agenda. As the efficacy of nonviolent alternatives to gridlock and political disputes failed, the reliance on violence, and also its scale, only escalated. Violence became Rome's strongest and most effective tool. This instrument was so prevalent, it was only removed once the Republic itself was removed.

Something of particular note is how the earlier days of the Roman Republic are described by authors such as Livy, Plutarch, and Sallust. All three praise the Roman Republic as a government where "virtue was held in high esteem," where "the closest unity prevailed, and avarice was a thing almost unknown."²⁰¹ In *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch celebrates figures like Camillus, Fabius Maximus, and Cato the Elder, while he fills the latter half with more morally ambiguous men such as Marius, Sulla, Crassus, and Caesar. This division comes from the idea that Rome was a perfect state, until – as Sallust describes - "growing love for money, and the lust of power which followed it, engendered every kind of evil."²⁰² Authors like Livy further suggest that Roman morality "slipped and finally began to fall headlong until we have reached the present times in which we can tolerate neither our own vices nor their remedies."²⁰³ Such a statement argues that the Roman people simply decayed in virtue and did not desire a return to the old ways of Roman governance.

None of those characterizations is entirely accurate. After the events of the Gracchi, the Saturninus/Marius alliance, the Social War, and especially Sulla's civil wars, there is a clear attempt to return to some sort of peaceful Republic. The reforms of Sulla best encapsulate this, as he goes out of his way to entirely reshape the government into a more

²⁰¹ Sallust, *The Conspiracy of Catiline*, 7.4-10.6.

²⁰² Sallust, *The Conspiracy of Catiline*, 7.4-10.6.

²⁰³ Livy, *The History of Rome*, Preface 9.

traditional form in a desperate attempt to prevent further outbreaks of violence and return Rome to its old, peaceful paradigm.

All of these attempts at peace - ranging from Lucius Opimius building a temple of Concord as a gesture of returning to nonviolence, to Sulla redefining the entirety of the tribunate - fail because they try to return Rome to a system which was unequipped to meet the demands of empire. The Gracchi demonstrated how the traditional powers of the tribunate could not handle the social issues brought upon by empire. The Social war displayed this very same lesson, and even more so via the decades of failed nonviolent legislation which preceded it. Violence is what allowed for Nasica to curb Tiberius' growing tyranny, when the standard means of rebuffing such excesses in power failed. Violence was the tool by which Marius, Saturninus, and Glaucia achieved their political ambitions, for it was the only instrument with the capacity to fulfill their entire agenda and get a former censor sent into exile. Political violence was the only means with which Sulla could truly settle the score with Marius. In all these examples, political violence came in as the agent of change, as the replacement to the archaic, failed government practices. It is only natural that these attempts to return Rome to its days of internal peace should fail, for these endeavors merely reestablished practices which had long ceased to be adequate.

Political violence did not cause the Roman Republic to fall; it was the instrument which allowed for its continued functionality. Violence was how laws could be passed, social change enacted, and disputes settled. All these things which the traditional institutions of the Republic were no longer able to adequately tackle, violence could achieve with unprecedented efficiency. It must be remembered that while the chaos of political violence was taking center stage in the city of Rome, its borders were growing at a rate which could

almost rival Alexander himself. In fact, the generation of Caesar and Pompey - a time of political violence unleashed - bore witness to victories over “Pontus, Armenia, Cappadocia, Paphlagonia, Media, Colchis, Iberia, Albania, Syria, Cilicia, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia and Palestine, Judaea, Arabia, and all the power of the pirates.”²⁰⁴ After defeating the Cimbri, Marius was hailed as the “third founder of Rome” and was “the savior of Italy,” but in truth, these distinctions ought to be conferred to political violence, the true savior of Rome.²⁰⁵ Violence rescued Rome from the threat of stagnation, perpetual political gridlock, and overall decline. Unfortunately for the Republic, a government run with violence can only continue until the promise of peace is far more desirable than any notion of republican virtue.

This historical example of political violence has dire implications for the events of January 6th, 2021. The frustrated, failed politics of today have already fueled the beginnings of political violence in the march upon the Capitol to change a presidential election. Once the process starts, it is difficult to reverse. Americans often make the mistake of being on watch for a Julius Caesar figure, but this intent is misplaced.²⁰⁶ The example of Rome demonstrates how figures like Julius Caesar come to fruition as a result of internalized political violence. What must be focused on is curbing political violence immediately which relies on the revitalization of nonviolent systems of political conflict and gridlock. Without this or some like action, violence in the American Republic will only increase until it becomes a standard mode of political expression. As observed in Rome, it does not take long for violence to embed itself into the very fabric of its government. Once this happens, it will be too late to

²⁰⁴ Plutarch, *The Life of Pompey*, 45.2.

²⁰⁵ Plutarch, *The Life of Gaius Marius*, 27.5, 39.3.

²⁰⁶ For an excellent example this, check out - Tim Elliot, “America Is Eerily Retracing Rome’s Steps to a Fall. Will It Turn Around Before It’s Too Late?” *Politico*, November 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/11/03/donald-trump-julius-caesar-433956>

salvage any sort of nonviolent republic. If we truly wish to avoid a future of domestic fury and fierce civil strife, further action to curb the efficacy and standardization of political violence must be taken immediately. Otherwise, cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war.

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