

You Are Here
100 B.C. – A.D. 79

STRUGGLE FOR LEADERSHIP

As you read in the last lesson, Rome controlled much of the Mediterranean world by 100 B.C. However, the republic was having problems at home. Powerful generals and politicians struggled for power. They brought North African grain for the poor. They led troops against pirates and enemies of Rome. Then they used their fame and popularity to try to become the supreme ruler of Rome.

Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar (SEE zuhr) was born into a patrician family in 100 B.C. As a young man, he served in various offices, both in the government and in the army. He also made many enemies among the patricians who controlled Rome.

Caesar was ambitious. One writer described how Caesar looked at a statue of Alexander the Great and sighed that he had “as yet done nothing noteworthy....”

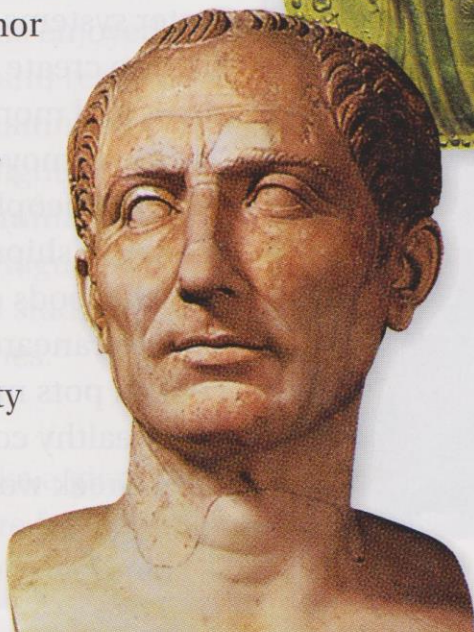
In 59 B.C. Caesar was elected Consul of Rome. The following year, he became the military governor of Roman **Gaul**, which today is part of France. In the next nine years, Caesar conquered the rest of Gaul extending Roman control to the English Channel. His victories gave him fame, riches, and the loyalty of a great army. He used these to make himself master of Rome.

The Senate worried about Caesar’s growing power. They ordered him to return to Rome without his army. Instead, in 49 B.C., Caesar and his army crossed the Rubicon River, which separated Italy from Gaul. (Even today, the expression “crossing the Rubicon” means making a decision that can’t be reversed).

Caesar’s decision led to a **civil war**, or war between groups within one country. Caesar’s main enemy was **Pompey**, another powerful general. Pompey’s army was defeated and he fled to Egypt, where he was murdered.

Caesar sailed to Alexandria, Egypt, and joined forces with 21-year-old **Cleopatra** (klee uh PA truh), Egypt’s queen. Caesar helped Cleopatra defeat her brother, who was also her rival for the throne. In return, she gave Caesar the money he needed to continue fighting for control of Rome.

In 45 B.C. Caesar returned in triumph to Rome and made himself **dictator**. A dictator is someone who rules with absolute power. Government under a dictator is called a dictatorship.



How did Caesar become dictator?

THE ROMAN EMPIRE IS CREATED

Although Caesar's time as dictator was short, he made important changes in Roman life. Caesar gave land to his soldiers and free grain to poor citizens. He increased the number of people in the Senate. Also, he granted Roman citizenship to many people not born in Rome. Caesar ordered a new and more accurate calendar and named the month of his birth "July."

All these changes were too much for some senators. Others were frightened of Caesar's growing power and popularity. Some felt he was destroying the traditions of the Roman Republic. They thought he was planning to make himself king.

Tradition says that an oracle warned Caesar to "beware the Ides (ĪDZ) of March" (March 15). On March 15, 44 B.C., Caesar ignored the warning and arrived at the Senate without a bodyguard. There, he was stabbed to death by his enemies.

Julius Caesar was killed by Roman senators in 44 B.C.



Augustus Becomes Emperor

After Caesar's death, civil war broke out again. After 14 years of fighting, Julius Caesar's grand-nephew and adopted son Octavian defeated all his rivals. Though only 18 years old when the wars began, Octavian was able to defeat some of Rome's most experienced generals.

After his victory in 27 B.C., Octavian was acclaimed *imperator*, or "one who commands." Our word "emperor" comes from "imperator." Octavian had the power to veto any law, rule all Roman provinces, and control the army.

As a sign of his new power, Octavian took the name **Augustus**, or "honored one." The month of August is named after this powerful ruler and general. Augustus then set about reforming the government of Rome.

Pax Romana

Within a few years, Rome's troubles were ending. A period known as the **Pax Romana** had begun. "Pax Romana" is Latin for "Roman peace." Life throughout the Roman Empire changed during this period, which lasted about 200 years. Under Augustus, the government became more efficient. New roads, buildings, and water systems were built. Augustus also tried to create a single system of government and money throughout the empire.

Goods moved freely within his empire. In Rome people ate bread each day, thanks to shipments of North African wheat. Goods came in from all over the Mediterranean region. Romans could cook in pots made from Spanish copper. The wealthy could wear clothes made from Greek wool, Egyptian linen, or even Chinese silk.