

Information on Marcus Cicero

Biographical Briefing

Marcus Cicero (pronounced MAR-kuss SISS-ah-roh) was born in 106 B.C.E. into a middle class Roman family. As a young man, he was educated in both Rome and Greece. Cicero became a highly skilled speaker, or *orator*, and he used his speaking skills to become an outstanding lawyer. Because of his powerful personality, Cicero had strong supporters and strong enemies throughout his public life. His supporters said he was ambitious, proud, and a passionate patriot. His enemies described him as egotistical, spiteful, stuffy, and pompous.

In 63 B.C.E. Cicero used his popularity as a lawyer to enter politics, and he was elected to the powerful position of *consul*. As consul, Cicero could prepare resolutions to become law, and decide civil and criminal cases. While he held office, Cicero earned wide support in the Senate. He uncovered a conspiracy plot against the state led by a defeated candidate for consul. The plotters intended to attack Rome, kill the consuls, and rob the city. Cicero made a dramatic speech in the Senate against the conspirators, and they were eventually arrested and executed.

Cicero was a strong defender of the Republican form of government. Therefore, he opposed the formation of the rule of the three leaders, or *triumvirate* (pronounced try-UM-ver-it) that came to power around 60 B.C.E. One of these leaders was Julius Caesar. Because Cicero opposed Caesar's rule, Cicero was forced to leave Rome for Greece. From there, Cicero supported and aided one of Caesar's enemies during the Roman civil war in 49 B.C.E. Despite this, the victorious Caesar pardoned him and allowed him to return to Rome the following year. In 44 B.C.E. Caesar was murdered by assassins. Cicero came forward once more as the champion of the Republic. However, he soon became a bitter enemy of Mark Antony—one of the new leaders of the Republic—when he delivered a series of blistering speeches against Antony in the Senate. Soldiers supporting Antony tracked down Cicero as he attempted to flee and killed him. They then cut off his hands and his head and brought them to Rome for public display.



- What aspects of Cicero's personality caused him to have both strong supporters and strong enemies?
- Why was Cicero considered by many to be a strong defender of the Roman Republic?
- What happened to Cicero after Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C.E.?

Position: Cicero felt that military conquests and expansion weakened the stability of the Roman government.

Main Points on Roman Expansion

Before Rome's expansion, its political leaders were patriotic men who often put the interests of the state ahead of their own. The legendary figure Lucius Cincinnatus (pronounced LOO-shuss sin-sin-AH-tuss) was one such leader admired by Cicero. Cincinnatus was a farmer who was called into service to help rescue a large Roman army blockaded by its enemy in the fifth century B.C.E. When he led the Roman army to victory, the people hailed him as a hero and offered him great power as a dictator. However, Cincinnatus had no interest in power for himself. He resigned his position after 16 days and returned to his farm.

After years of military conquests and expansion, Rome's political scene changed. It was no longer dominated by patriotic men who placed duty above personal gain. Instead, it became a political battleground for the members of the Senate, the business class, and ambitious leaders.

For a time, the Senate violently eliminated political opposition when it felt threatened. In the 50 years between 133 and 82 B.C.E., seven consuls, one judge or *praetor* (pronounced PRAY-tor) and four tribunes were murdered, or died fighting other Romans. Political reformers, such as the Gracchus (pronounced GRAH-kuss) brothers, were killed by Senate-inspired mobs to prevent them from increasing the power of the popular Assembly.

Later, ambitious, powerful generals used troops to seize power. Once in power, these generals killed anyone they believed threatened their rule. One such general was Sulla (pronounced SULL-ah), who in 82 B.C.E. began a program called *proscription*. He posted lists of names of his enemies in the Great Forum, the main seat of government. Those whose names appeared were killed immediately, and their property was seized. Anyone who helped a man whose name was on the list was also executed. Those who performed the executions received handsome rewards. Sulla killed and seized the property of 40 senators and 1,600 wealthy Romans.



- How did Roman political leaders behave before Rome's military expansion?
- What groups in Roman society battled for political control after Rome's military expansion?
- Who was Sulla? What trend in Roman politics did Sulla's actions reflect?