

# Information on Tiberius Gracchus

## Biographical Briefing

Tiberius Gracchus (pronounced ty-BIR-ee-uss GRAH-kuss) was born in 163 B.C.E. into a well-to-do *plebeian* family. Growing up, he enjoyed a traditional Greek education—which included the study of philosophy, mathematics, and the Greek language—and this gave him an open-minded view of the world. As a young man, he served in the Roman army, and distinguished himself during the last Punic War in Carthage and later in Spain. During his service in the army, Tiberius traveled throughout the Italian peninsula. He noted that many of the people who worked the land were foreign slaves, because small property holders had to serve in the army. When he returned home, he discovered many people in the city living in poverty. Tiberius felt that these two situations could help bring about the end of the Republic. To find solutions to these problems, he decided to enter politics.

In 133 B.C.E. he was elected *tribune*—a high position in the Citizens' Assemblies. He immediately began to campaign for land reform. He wanted to pass a law that would divide huge estates belonging to the rich into smaller farms, and distribute them among the poor. Tiberius's idea proved quite popular with the common people but was strongly opposed by large landowners. Tiberius wanted to ensure the passage of land reform laws. So, he announced that he would run for a second term as tribune, an unusual action at the time. This enraged the members of the Senate, and they organized a plot against him. His enemies stirred up a mob of rioters who seized Tiberius and many of his followers and killed them.



- What experiences did Tiberius have before entering politics?
- How did Tiberius intend to reform Roman land policy?
- What groups opposed Tiberius's reform policies?



**Position:** Tiberius believed that expansion hurt Rome because it drove small farmers off the land and placed food production in the hands of the wealthy class and foreigners.

### Main Points on Roman Expansion

Tiberius believed that military expansion hurt the Roman Republic because it harmed small farmers. Before the Punic Wars, small farmers—who often owned plots of less than 10 acres—raised enough food to feed themselves and to help feed the Roman people. The Punic Wars changed this situation in several ways. First, many small farmers were drafted to fight in the Roman army, and some never returned to their farms. Second, the constant warfare severely damaged the Italian farmland. When farmers did return home, they lacked the money to repair the damage. So, they were forced to sell their land to rich landlords.

Roman military conquests forced small farmers off their land in another way. Following the conquest of an area, Rome usually took away, or *confiscated*, one third of the land from the conquered people. The government did not have the money to develop this state land. So, it rented or sold the land to the only people who had the money to buy it: wealthy generals and senators. Soon, the entire system of farming changed. Large farms—called *latifundias* (pronounced lah-tee-FOON-dee-yas)—owned by the rich, replaced small farms. These new large farms used slave labor, and the few remaining small farmers found they could not produce crops as cheaply as the large farms. Eventually these small farmers also sold their property to the rich and moved to the larger cities in search of work.

The growth of large farms caused another problem. The owners began to grow profitable “cash crops”—such as olives, grapes, and fruit—instead of grain. This made Rome more dependent on imported grain, which was grown cheaply in Egypt and North Africa. Prior to expansion, Rome could rely on its own farmers to feed the Roman population. Now, it had to depend on foreign trade for the most basic food necessities.



- **Why were small Roman farmers driven off their lands after the Punic Wars?**
- **What were latifundias? Why couldn't small farmers compete with the owners of the latifundias?**
- **Why did Rome become more dependent on imported grains after the Punic Wars?**