**Lecture Nine -- The Last Generation of the Roman Republic**

The civil war between Caesar and the Senatorial forces under Pompey began in January of 49 BC. We shall examine how Caesar, despite being outnumbered, won a series of stunning victories, and ultimately won the war in 45 BC. By its end, the war had claimed the lives of both Pompey and Cato the Younger, together with tens of thousands of Roman soldiers. It marked the bloodiest stage yet in the Roman Revolution, and the penultimate moment of demise for the Republic.

**Overview**

**I**. The civil war of 49-45 BC was tantamount to a Roman World War in its extent, including theatres in Greece, Spain, and Africa.

**A**. Caesar's military genius, however, shone brightly throughout, and his famed *celeritas* or "swiftness" drove Pompey and the *optimates* out of Italy in 49 BC eastwards towards Pompey's power base.

**B**. After breaking a siege at Dyrrachium, Pompey moved eastward yet again, and was engaged by Caesar at Pharsalus in northern Greece in 48 BC.

**1**. Despite a great numerical disadvantage, Caesar's experienced legions crushed their opponents.

**2**. Reviewing the carnage in the aftermath of the battle, Caesar commented, "it was they who wanted it so."

**3**. Pompey fled the field and headed further east to continue the fight. Stopping in Egypt, however, he was ignominiously killed by a local claimant to the Ptolemaic throne.

**C**. Having chased Pompey to Egypt, Caesar got embroiled in dynastic politics there, and was delayed in Alexandria during the winter of 48-7 BC.

**1**. This was also when he met, and commenced his love affair with the famous Cleopatra, one of the protagonists in the Egyptian dynastic feud, and an able and ambitious woman in her own right.

**a**. The affair produced a son, Caesarion, or "Little Caesar," born in 47 BC.

**D**. Next, Caesar fought local renegades and supporters of Pompey in Asia, Africa, and Spain, defeating all in his path.

**1**. In 47 BC, he suppressed a native revolt in Asia in five days, giving rise to his famous dictum, *Veni, Vidi, Vici* ("I came, I saw, I conquered).

**2**. In 46 BC, he fought a set-piece battle in Thapsus in Africa, defeating the Pompeians decisively.

**a**. In the wake of this defeat, the leader of the *optimates*, Cato the Younger, committed suicide at Utica in Africa.

**3**. The following year, 45 BC, Caesar crushed another of Pompey's armies at Munda in Spain.

**a**. The Battle of Munda marked the official end of the civil war.

**b**. Although pockets of resistance to Caesar and his successors were to continue for a decade, after Munda, Caesar was the unchallenged master of the Roman world.

**II**. Caesar's means of legitimizing his constitutional position showed a disregard for traditional forms and conservative sensibilities.

**A**. Caesar enacted a policy of sparing his captured opponents (*clementia*), whch was a shrewd political maneuver to place them forever under an obligation to him.

**B**. He placed some of his spared opponents in positions of responsibility in his new regime (such as C. Cassius Longinus, who became praetor in 44 BC).

**C**. But when Caesar began to organize his official position in the state, he revealed an almost total lack of tact in his exercise of power.

**1**. Ignoring its hateful associations with Sulla, Caesar employed the dictatorship, in conjunction with frequent consulships, as his office of choice.

**a**. In 49 BC, Caesar was dictator for only eleven days, long enough to organize consular elections and see himself installed as consul for 48 BC.

**b**. In 47 BC, he resumed the dictatorship and held it continuously from then until his death.

**c**. In fact, it was extended from a one year to ten year duration in 46 BC, and a lifetime tenure in February of 44 BC.

**d**. As dictator, Caesar passed a mass of legislation on various issues, but none of it was aimed at regularizing his position or tackling the fundamental ills of the state.

**D**. Aside from this irregular usage of the Republican offices, Caesar displayed in his words and deeds little concern for conservative opinion.

**1**. He said that Sulla did not know his ABCs when he gave up the dictatorship, thereby signaling his intent to rule as dictator for as long as he could.

**2**. He declared the Republic a mere word without form or substance.

**3**. On one occasion, he greeted the senators while seated like a despot.

**E**. In response, the Senate acted with abject sycophancy in voting him honors, including even deification.

**F**. In 44 BC, the infamous crown-offering incident occurred, which was taken by many as a sign that Caesar's ultimate goal was kingship itself.

**IV**. Alarmed by Caesar's openly autocratic behavior, a group of nobles numbering perhaps eighty members, and led by C. Cassius Longinus, conspired to assassinate Caesar.

**A**. The conspirators carried out the act on March 15th (the "Ides of March"), 44 BC.

**1**. The limited focus of the so-called Liberators proved their greatest mistake.

**Anthony and Octavian**

**I**. The Liberators had formulated no plan for what to do once Caesar was dead, and this gave Caesar's faction an opportunity to organize itself.

**A**. The Liberators seemed to believe that the Republic would spring reborn, phoenix- like, from the ashes of Caesar's tyranny.

**B**. They made no plans to dispose of Caesar's supporters, now led by Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony), Caesar's right-hand man.

**C**. They made no moves to secure broader military or popular support.

**D**. Worried by the mob's sullen reception of their newly won liberty, the Liberators withdrew to the Capitol in fear.

**II**. As the confusion began to die down, and the Caesarians realized they were not targets of murder plots, Mark Antony seized the initiative from the inert assassins.

**A**. He staged Caesar's funeral in the very center of Rome, in the Forum.

**B**. Here he gave an inflammatory speech and unveiled Caesar's will, in which the dictator left three hundred sesterces to every Roman citizen in the city.

**C**. These actions, combined with the pathetic sight of their hero's butchered corpse, roused the mob into a riot in which the Liberators were forced to flee the city altogether.

**1**. With the Liberators driven out, Antony stood supreme in the Caesarian camp.

**III**. Caesar's will contained a surprise for Antony, and brought into play a man who was eventually to emerge as Rome's first emperor.

**A**. In addition to various bequests to the mob, Caesar designated in his will his great- nephew C. Octavius, as hi adoptive son.

**B**. C. Octavius, only eighteen years old in March of 44 BC, and of obscure origins by Roman standards, was away in Illyricum, training to join Caesar's planed Parthian campaign.

**C**. When he heard of his adoption by Caesar, he acted with great boldness and travelled to Rome to claim his inheritance.

**D**. Now with the name C. Julius Caesar Octavianus (hereafter Octavian), the young man met with Antony to stake his claim.

**1**. Antony acted with unwise haste, and snubbed the youth out of hand; this proved a mistake.

a. Meanwhile, the Senate vacillated, and tensions between the Liberators and Antony erupted into open conflict.

**b**. The Senate's confusion is evidenced by its simultaneous pardoning of the Liberators and ratification of all of Caesar's acts.

**c**. Antony and the Liberators appeared to be coming to an understanding, insofar as the Senate assigned commands to members of the conspiracy and to Caesarians alike.

**d**. Antony reshuffled the Senate's allotment of commands to favor himself, giving himself Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul, in addition to Macedonia as assigned him by the Senate.

**IV**. The Senate's appointee to Cisalpine Gail, the conspirator D. Brutus, refused to relinquish his command, as he considered Antony's claim to it illegitimate.

**A**. Antony then march against Brutus, and besieged him in Mutina in his province.

**B**. Antony then made a move against Octavian, and he attempted to have Octavian arraigned on trumped up charges.

**1**. In response, Octavian raised two legions from among his father's veterans in Italy, a force soon augmented by mass defections from among Antony's troops -- such was the pull of the name of Caesar.

**C**. A two-sided power struggle thus evolved between the Liberators and the Caesarians on the one hand, and between Antony and Octavian within the Caesarian camp on the other.

**1**. The ineffectual Senate was caught in the middle.

**2**. In the matter of Mutina, the Senate sided with Brutus, its appointee to Cisalpine Gaul, and commanded the consuls for 43 BC to relieve him from Antony's siege.

**V**. At Cicero's instigation, the Senate conferred propraetorian status on Octavian, and assigned him the task of helping the consuls remove Antony, thus making him help one of his adoptive father's assassins, D. Brutus.

**A**. Both Cicero and the Senate saw Antony as the major threat to the Republic's liberty, and seemed to have believed that Octavian could be used and then discarded.

**B**. In fighting outside Mutina, Antony was bested and withdrew to his province in Transalpine Gaul.

**C**. But within a few weeks, he had returned with a huge force drawn from Spain and Gaul, and occupied Cisalpine Gaul unopposed.

**D**. Octavian has assisted Brutus in Mutina, but he refused to cooperate with him further, and returned to Rome, expecting appreciation and some reward from the Senate; instead, he found himself snubbed.

**VI**. Having declared Antony a public enemy, the Senate honored the Liberators and snubbed Octavian, with disastrous consequences.

**A**. D. Brutus was granted a triumph, Antony was outlawed, and Octavian was ignored.

**B**. Octavian then marched his army to Rome in the late fall of 43 BC, and occupied it.

**C**. He staged consular elections and saw himself elected consul at the age of twenty.

**D**. He formalized his rift with the Liberators by having their amnesty of the previous year revoked.

**E**. Far from discarding Octavian, the Senate now had to endure his unbridled military autocracy.

**1**. Octavian realized, however, that his ascendancy was temporary, and therefore turned his mind to making his position more secure.

**The Second Triumvirate**

**I**. Octavian's position in the early fall of 43 BC was precarious.

**A**. Antony was marshalling huge forces in both Gauls.

**B**. Driven from Rome and Italy, the Liberators fled east, there to organize Republican resistance to Caesarian domination.

**C**. To strengthen his position, Octavian mended bridges with Antony, and, together with another leading Caesarian, M. Aemilius Lepidus, formed the Second Triumvirate.

**1**. Together, the three marched their combined forces to Rome.

**2**. The Second Triumvirate differed significantly from the first.

**a**. Its dominance was formalized in a law passed by a tribune, P. Titus, on November 27, 43 BC.

**b**. According to this law, Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian were named *triumviri rei peublicae constituendae consulari potestate* (the Board of Three Men with Consular Power for the Organization of the State) for a period of five years.

**c**. Effectively, the three were a military junta.

**d**. The Second Triumvirate dominated Roman politics for the next decade, but like its informal predecessor, the relationship between the Triumvirs was strained.

**II**. Short of money to pay their troops, the first act of the new Triumvirate was to instigate proscriptions of the suspect in the city and in Italy.

**A**. Thousands perished and had their property confiscated.

**B**. The leading victim of these proscriptions was Cicero, who had supported Octavian against Antony in the affair of Mutina.

**1**. Cicero had also delivered devastating oratorical attacks against Antony in the Senate; the speeches called Philippics, are all still extant,

**2**. Antony did not forget Cicero's enmity, and Octavian acquiesced in having his former supporter proscribed.

**3**. Chased down while fleeing to the coast, Cicero was decapitated on December 7th, 42 BC.

**4**. His hands and head were nailed to the speaker's platform in the Forum, the place where Cicero had delivered so many of his famous orations.

**C**. The triumvirs also orchestrated the deification of their slain leader, C. Julius Caesar, and initiated the construction of his temple in the Roman Forum.

**1**. Octavian could now claim divine descent.

**a**. He immediately added *divi filius* ("son of a god") to his nomenclature.

**III**. The Triumvirs then moved against the Liberators.

**A**. The Liberators were building significant forces in Greece and the east.

**B**. Antony and Octavian went east with their combined forces and met the Republican armies at Philippi in September 42 BC.

**1**. In two related battles, the Republicans were bested, and Cassius and Brutus, the leaders of the conspiracy, committed suicide. (Notably, Octavian was a sickly youth, and he played little or no rile in these victories).

**2**. The Caesarians were now supreme in the Roman world.

**IV**. Tensions within the Triumvirate emerged almost immediately.

**A**. When the Triumvirate had been formed, Lepidus had been assigned a minor territory in Africa, so he was effectively sidelined as a major player.

**B**. Following Philippi, Antony moved further east, since this is where most of his assigned territories lay; Octavian stayed in Italy.

**1**. Octavian made himself unpopular with his arrogant attitude and massive confiscations of land to settle his veterans (only eleven out of forty five Caesarian legions were to remain under arms).

**V**. An obscure event at Perusia shows how tense the relations were between Antony and Octavian.

**A**. In 41 BC, Mark Antony's wife, Fulvia, and brother, L. Antonius, fomented armed insurrection against Octavian in Italy.

**B**. Mark Antony's involvement was moot, but the actions themselves speak volumes about the perceived relationship between the two leading Triumvirs.

**C**. Octavian moved against Antonius and Fulvia and besieged them at Perusia.

**D**. Antonius was spared, but Octavian ordered the Perusine councilors executed, making himself still more unpopular in Italy.

**VI**. Antony moved west in 41-40 BC, and civil war between him and Octavian seemed imminent.

**A**. At a meeting at Brundisium in 40 BC, however, their differences were resolved and the assignment of territories was refined.

**1**. Octavian got the entire west, Antony the east, and Lepidus was confirmed in Africa.

**2**. Antony was married to Octavian's sister, Octavia, since Fulvia had died shortly after the Perusine affair.

**VII**. For the next four years, the Triumvirs were primarily engaged with affairs in their respective halves of the empire.

**A**. The triumvirate was renewed, Lepidus was squeezed out, and Octavian and Antony focused their attention on their own spheres of jurisdiction.

**VIII**. In 37 BC, the Triumvirate was renewed for a further five years, with Lepidus still holed up in Africa.

**A**. Sextus Pompeius, a son of Pompey the Great, had organized a sort of pirate kingdom in Sicily and Sardinia that took Octavian four years to suppress.

**B**. Following Sextus' defeat in 36 BC, Lepidus made his move and tried to seize Italy and Sicily, but was easily put down by Octavian.

**C**. Lepidus was stripped of his triumviral powers, and "retired" to a seaside town near Rome.

**D**. Antony, meanwhile, was occupied in the east with ineffectual campaigns against the Parthians.

**1**. He made his based in Alexandria, and inherited Caesar's dalliance with the Ptolemaic queen, Cleopatra.

**Octavian Emerges Supreme**

**I.** In the five years following 36 BC, Octavian reinvented himself as the savior of traditions of the west, and launched a propaganda campaign against Antony.

**A**. Seeing the broad support he had garnered in his struggle against Sextus Poempeius, Octavian determined to change his political image, and seek bases for his power other than military.

**1**. In doing so, Octavian showed that he was already thinking in the longer term about how the Roman state could be recognized and rendered stable once more.

**B**. In a remarkable PR stunt, he began to position himself as the defender of traditional western, Roman ways.

**1**. He did so mainly by portraying Antony as in the thrall of a foregin despot who had designs on the Roman Empire as well.

**2**. Anthony's behavior played directly into Octavian's hands, particularly the event in 34 BC, known as the Donations of Alexandria.

**a**. Antony and Cleopatra lived openly as a couple in Alexandria, dspite Antony's marriage to Octavia.

**b**. In 34 BC, to celebrate his victories against the Parthians, Antony staged a pageant in the gymnasium in Alexandria.

**c**. In these Donations of Alexandria, Antony and Cleopatra appeared enthroned with their three children, and Caesarion.

**d**. Caesarion was hailed as King of Kings, Cleopatra as Queen of Kings.

**e**. The eastern Roman Empire was divided among Antony and Cleopatra and their three children, and Caesarion was acclaimed the true son of Caesar, a direct challenge to the basis of Octavian's legitimacy.

**II**. Given all these factors, Octavian and Antony began preparing for war.

**A**. After a diplomatic war of words in 33-2 BC, the civil war, when it came, proved anticlimactic.

**B**. Antony and Octavian had very different reactions to the lapse and nonrenewal of the Triumvirate in 33 BC.

**C**. Antony behaved as of the lapse had not occurred, and he continued to use the title Triumvir until his death.

**D**. Now the respecter of Roman ways, Octavian abandoned the title and technically reverted to the status of a private citizen.

**1**. However, using tribunes and intimidation, he successfully outmaneuvered the consuls of 33 BC, both of whom supported Antony, and drove Antony's supporters in the Senate out of Italy.

**III**. In 32 BC, Octavian revealed the contents of Antony's will, which shocked public opinion in the west.

**A**. Antony declared Caesarion the true heir of Caesar.

**B**. Antony wished to be buried by Cleopatra's side.

**C**. Rumors that Antony intended to move the seat of Roman government to Alexandria and install Cleopatra as queen of the Romans turned the tide of opinion in favor of Octavian.

**1**. This oath became the basis of Octavian's claim to leadership of teh west.

**2**. In contrast, Antony had no legal standing whatsoever in Roman eyes.

**IV**. The two leaders moved against each other in the summer of 31 BC, but the war, declared against Cleopatra, ended quickly.

**A**. Antony's armies and fleet moved into Greece and camped at Actium on the Adriatic.

**B**. Octavian moved to counter him with thirty legions and some six hundred ships.

**C**. Under the direct command of M. Vipsanius Agrippa, one of Octavian's leading supporters from the very beginning of his career in 44 BC, Octavian's fleet crushed the combined navy of Antony and Cleopatra in the bay at Actium on September 2nd, 31 BC.

**1**. The land forces did not engage.

**D**. In the wake of Actium, Antony and Cleopatra fled back to Egypt, pursued by Octavian.

**1**. Their troops either capitulated or deserted en masse to Octavian.

**E**. As Octavian closed in on Alexandria in 30 BC, Cleopatra committed suicide, followed shortly thereafter by Antony.

**F**. Caesarion was murdered, but Antony's children by Cleopatra were spared.

**G**. Octavian annexed Egypt as a province, thereby ending the history of the last and longest-lived of the Hellenistic kingdoms.

**H**. Octavian also gained access to the vast wealth of the Ptolemies, allowing him to pay off his troops with money to spare.

**V**. In 29 BC, his victory complete and now in sole control of the entire Roman world, Octavian returned a hero to Rome, and began the long process of reorganizing the state. His emergence as sole ruler brought the Roman Revolution to an end.

Looking back over the course of the Roman Revolution, it has proven a hard task to determine when the Republic ceased to exist. The best view is that there was no definitive moment when the Republic ended, but rather there was a process of gradual and gathering ineffectiveness that saw more and more power concentrated in the hands of individuals at the heads of armies rather than in those legally elected and duly appointed magistrates. The Republic then did not so much fall as fade away imperceptibly. A city- state government had basically been shown incapable of governing an empire.