**Lecture Seven -- The Gracchi Brothers**

Although the Roman Revolution was not planned, it had a definite starting point: the tribunates of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus in 133 and 123-122 BC, respectively. At its end, the Roman state was transformed once more into monarchy, albeit one shrouded in the vestments of the Republic. The story of these events occupies the following three lectures. At the beginning of this lecture, we shall look briefly at the broad nature of the revolution, and then turn our attention to the tumultuous events of 133 and 123-121 BC. A respected scion of a noble house, Tiberius Gracchus started out to fix a definite problem, but employed means that ultimately signposted a new route to power for the ambitious. His brother, Gaius Gracchus, was less focused than Tiberius, but his actions showed that a revolution was underway, and political alliances became polarized ever afterward. More than anything else, however, the legacy of the Gracchi was to introduce violence into domestic Roman politics.

**Outline**

**I**. The Roman Revolution was not a planned event, but a long series of interconnected events that built upon precedent to have a devastating, cumulative effect on the Republic.

**A**. The Roman Republic spanned several generations.

**B**. Unlike the Russian Revolution, for instance, nobody planned the Roman Revolution, or enacted it for ideological reasons.

**C**. Rather, it was a series of events in the domestic and foreign spheres that built upon precedent to form an increasingly violent spiral of disorder and disruption.

**D**. The ultimate effect of these events was to overthrow the Republic and replace it with the rule of the emperors.

**II**. The tribune of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 BC was the starting point for the Revolution.

**A**. Ti. Sempronius Gracchus, a nobleman, set out on the path of land reform.

**1**. Gracchus was aware of the problems with land-holding and manpower availability that had resulted from the growth of empire.

**2**. As tribune of the plebs in 133 BC, he proposed a land law to reform land- holding, and create more small farmers who would be eligible for military service.

**3**. An old law (from 367 BC) was to be revived, limiting the amount of public land (*ager publicus*) any one citizen could own. Citizens holding excessive amounts of public land had to return the surplus to the state. The repossessed land would then be distributed among the landless poor which compromised the headcount.

**4**. Although his law was to the disadvantage of the rich, Gracchus had support in the Senate.

**5**. The issue of Ti. Gracchus' motivation has been a matter of scholarly controversy; different views conclude that:

**a**. He was a genuine reformer working for the benefit of the state.

**b**. He was a revolutionary working for personal gain.

**c**. He was a Roman politician, with one eye on a genuine need, and the other on the benefits to himself and his supporters.

**B**. The conflict over Ti. Gracchus' law led to disastrous consequences.

**1**. Ti. Gracchus bypassed the Senate and proposed the law to the people in the Tribal Council of the Plebs.

**2**. The Senate contracted another tribune, M. Octavius, to veto Gracchus' bill.

**3**. Ti. Gracchus responded by having Octavius deposed by plebescite. He thereby undermined one of the central concepts of Roman office-holding: collegiality.

**4**. Ti. Gracchus' law passed, but the Senate refused to fund its implementation.

**5**. Ti. Gracchus then proposed a law diverting the taxes from the new province of Asia (the former kingdom of Pergamum) to fund his land reform. He thereby insinuated the popular assembly into the Senate's traditional preserves of state finances and foreign affairs.

**6**. Believing that the work of the Land Commission needed further protection, Ti. Gracchus declared his intention to stand for the tribunate of 132 BC. He thereby undermined the other central concept of Roman office-holding: limited tenure of office.

**7**. Alarmed senators could see in front of them the prospect of rule by tribunes at the head of the tribal assembly. As Gracchus held an election rally, some senators went out of the senate house and beat him and three hundred of his followers to death with bench legs. The corpse of Gracchus, like that of a common criminal, was thrown into the Tiber.

**C**. Whatever his motives of intentions, Ti. Gracchus' legacy was not a good one.

**1**. In pushing his land bill through, he had exposed a fatal weakness in the traditional machinery of the Republican government: the Senate had no legal power, but the tribal assembly did.

**2**. Others wanting to challenge the Senate now had a new avenue to power opened for them.

**3**. More importantly, violence had been used to suppress T. Gracchus, and thereby it entered Roman domestic politics for the first time.

**III**. The tribunates of C. Gracchus in 123-121 BC were more overtly revolutionary than Tiberius' had been.

**A**. C. Gracchus was not motivated by one issue, but instead he passed a series of laws on various issues.

**1**. C. Gracchus was more of a demagogue than Tiberius, and more antagonistic toward the Senate.

**2**. His laws seem to have been intended to garner support for himself from the following groups:

**a**. The people (by means of the provision of cheap grain, employment on road repair projects, and the foundation of overseas colonies for the landless.

**b**. Knights (by means of fiscal proposals and authorization to sit on juries in extortion cases).

**c**. The Italian allies (Latin rights to be fully enfranchised; non-Latin allies to be given Latin rights).

**3**. The issue of the status of the allies had emerged as a serious one in the 120s BC, and the Romans were reluctant to share citizenship so widely; C. Gracchus's proposal for mass enfranchisement undermined his popularity.

**4**. In 122 BC, the Senate contracted with a tribune, M. Livius Drusus, to "outbid" C. Gracchus. Livius offered free grain, colonies in Italy rather than overseas, and better treatment in the army for allies.

**5**. The people deserted C. Gracchus for Livius; tensions rose as his second tribunate came to an end, and he face prosecution.

**6**. Fearing for his safety C. Gracchus began using surreptitiously armed bodyguards.

**7**. When a brawl broke out at a political meeting, a riot resulted, and the Senate issued a decree or martial law (*senatus consultum ultimum*).

**8**. C. Gracchus and 3,000 of his supporters perished in the ensuing street fighting.

**B**. The Gracchi had challenged the Senate's authority, indicated a novel route to power at Rome, and paid a heavy price for doing do. But by suppressing them with violence, the Senate pave the way for the ultimate collapse of the Republic.

**Marius and Sulla**

The years immediately following the demise of the Gracchi were relatively quiet, even if post-Gracchan politics at Rome were more polarized. In Africa, and in the North, however, threats were looming that were to catapult C. Marius, an unknown "new man," to the pinnacle of power and influence at Rome. His rival, however, L. Cornelius Sulla, eventually overshadowed Marius. We shall now examine the career of Marius, and the rise of Sulla, seeing how, with them, the pace of the Roman Revolution quickened.

**I**. Roman politics became more polarized in the wake of the Gracchi. Roman politicians increasingly fell into one of two groups.

**A** Those who followed the new route to power pointed out by the Gracchi were termed *populares* ("Men of the People"), and favored using tribunes, the tribal assembly, and an anti-senatorial posture to enable their advancement.

**B**. In opposition to the *populares* stood the self-styled *optimates* ("Best Ones"), who looked to the traditional, Senate-dominated way of doing things.

**C**. These groups were based more on methods than on ideology, in the modern sense.

**II**. C. Marius a "new man" from Arpinum in Italy, rose to prominence by virtue of spectacular successes.

**A**. Marius' early political career was lackluster. He first gained fame by defeating enemies of Rome in Numidia.

**1**. Jugurtha, king of allied kingdom of Numidia, had been fighting a war with Rome from 111 BC on war.

**2**. Jugurtha eluded defeat through a combination of clever military tactics and bribery of Roman commanders.

**3**. While serving as an officer in Numidia, Marius stood for the consulship of 107 BC on the promise of ending the Jugurthine War in one year.

**4**. As consul for the second time in 105 BC, he ended the war, and had Jugurtha captured. The officer who actually effected the capture was named L. Cornelius Sulla.

**B**. Marius was now the people's military hero. In 104-100 BC, he achieved an unprecedented position of power as a result of the threat of Germanic tribes in the north.

**1**. Since the 120s BC, two Germanic tribes, the Cimbri and the Teutones, had left their native lands in Denmark, and had been wandering near the Italian border, as well as in Gaul.

**2**. They had already defeated three Roman armies when, in 105 BC, they crushed a consular army at Arausio in Gallia Transalpina (a new province formed in 121 BC).

**3**. Memories of the Gallic sack of 390 BC caused panic at Rome; Marius was cast in the role of Savior.

**4**. Holding successive consulships (104, 103, 102), Marius raised and trained a new army, and crushed the Teutones at Aquae Sextiae (Aix-en-Provence).in 102 BC, and the Cimbri at Vercellae in 101 BC.

**5**. In 100 BC, Marius was supreme, now holding his sixth consulship in eight years.

**6**. Not as sharp a politician as he was a soldier, Marius was outmaneuvered by his opponents in his sixth consulship at Rome, and he retired to private life.

**C**. To effect his victories, Marius made several important military reform.

**1**. His reforms contributed to the ultimate professionalization of the Roman army (e.g., standing legions, standards), and made it more effective in the field.

**2**. In terms of enlistment, however, he made a major move. Marius enrolled and equipped, at state expense, the unused Head Count (*capite censi*) at Rome. These soldiers were promised land grants in return for their service.

**3**. The move had lasting political ramifications, largely unrealized by Marius himself: it created a landless soldiery dependent on the patronage of its commanders for the rewards of their service.

**4**. Through Marius' reforms, the Roman military became more efficient, but also more politicized.

**5**. The events of Marius' sixth consulship in 100 BC illustrate the point well.

**III**. Sulla rose to prominence, initially as a subordinate of Marius, but later as a commander in his own right during the social war (91--88 BC)

**A**. A patrician, Sulla emerged under Marius, but had no love for him.

**1**. Sulla had served with Marius against Jugurtha, whose captured he had organized, and the Teutones.

**2**. Sulla hailed from an old, but impoverished patrician family, the opposite of Marius.

**3**. Sulla and Marius may initially have been on good terms, but they fell out at some stage (possibly over Marius' failure to acknowledge Sulla's capture of Jugurtha.)

**B**. The issue of allies continued to burn in the 90s BC, but flared into war in 91 BC; Sulla capped his career in this Social War (91-88 BC).

**1**. The issue of enfranchising the Italian allies had continued to burn without being addressed from the time of C. Gracchus onward.

**2**. In 91 BC, a tribune, M. Livius Drusus, prepared to pass a law enfranchising the allies, but was murdered before it could be passed.

**3**. In response, some of the allies, especially the Samnites and some south Italian communities, formed a secessionist state ("Italia"), and went to war with Rome.

**a**. It was a vicious, but needless conflict, for the Romans conceded enfranchisement to all loyal communities within one year of the outbreak of hostilities.

**b**. Many rebels now reverted to Rome, but the Samnites continued to fight.

**4**. This "War of the Allies" (as "Social War" means) lasted three years, and saw Marius emerge from retirement to take command of the Roman forces in north Italy, while Sulla, as propraetor, got the southern theater of command.

**5**. Although Marius and Sulla cooperated during the Social War, their enmity broke out once more at war's end, and cast the Republic into the abyss of civil war.

**The "Royal Rule of Sulla"**

The conflict between Marius and Sulla was to hold disastrous consequences for the beleaguered Republic. We shall now examine hoe this conflict played itself out in the 80s, and we shall trace the rise of Sulla to supreme power on the backs of his soldiers, leading to the period often referred to by the Romans as the *Sullanum Romanum* (the "Royal Rule of Sulla"). Sulla, in fact, acquired power by violence, and then revived the long-dormant office of dictator to enact a series of laws aimed at restoring order to the state. We shall then survey Sulla's dictatorial legislation, and assess the agenda behind it. We shall set Sulla's career against the broader backdrop of the Roman Revolution, and consider why his attempted settlement of the Republic's ailments was ultimately doomed to failure.

**I**. With the Social War ended, the enmity between Marius and Sulla reached new peaks that led to the setting of the worst precedents yet in the Roman Revolution.

**A**. During the Social War, an eastern king had risen to challenge Roman authority in Asia; competition for the command against him led Sulla to take drastic measures.

**1**. Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus was an ambitious king, who, in 89 BC, took advantage of Roman preoccupations in Italy to seize Asia, and raise the banner of Greek revolt against Rome.

**2**. In a desperate act, the so-called Asiatic Vespers, Mithridates ordered all Romans and Italians in his realm killed on a single evening. The resulting bloodbath, by some accounts, killed as many as 80,000 people.

**3**. Both Sulla and the aging Marius wanted the command against Mithridates, both for its glory, and for the promise of riches that it offered.

**4**. As consul in 88 BC, Sulla was assigned the command by the Senate, according to traditional procedure.

**5**. Marius contracted a colorful tribune, P. Sulpicius Rufus, to assign the command to him by vote of the people.

**6**. The situation illustrates well the division between *optimates* (Sulla accepting command from the Senate), and *populares* (Marius having the command voted to him by the people).

**B**. Sulla's reaction and Marius' counter-reaction were both swift and violent, setting a bad precedent.

**1**. Sulla went to his six legions in Campania, and garnered their support.

**2**. He then turned his army on Rome, and drove Marius out of the city, calling him a tyrant.

**3**. Having settled affairs in Rome, and put a bounty on Marius' head, Sulla went east to fight Mithridates.

**a**. Although Sulla was trying to reinforce a traditional government rather than overthrow it, he had carried out the single most revolutionary act in Roman history to that time: he had marched a Roman army against Romans.

**b**. With this precedent now in play, Sulla unknowingly condemned the Republic to decades of more and increasing violence.

**4**. Marius fled to Africa, but in 87 BC, returned to Italy, joined forces with a rebel consul, L. Cornelius Cinna, and marched on Rome to reverse Sulla's settlement.

**5**. Marius then wreaked his revenge on the city that had betrayed him until Cinna intervened to stop the butchery and chaos.

**6**. Declaring himself consul for the seventh time for 86 BC, Marius died within days of taking office.

**II**. Sulla returned from the east to wage an all-out war on his opponents in Italy.

**A**. After fighting a difficult and indecisive campaign against Mithridates in 88-83 BC, he returned to fight a major civil war in Italy.

**1**. Between 88 and 84 BC, a strange situation obtained: Sulla was fighting a war on behalf of a Rome governed by his political opponents; a showdown was imminent.

**2**. After concluding a disgraceful peace with Mithridates in 85 BC, and plundering the rich cities of the east, Sulla returned to Italy in 83 BC.

**3**. Sulla fought and defeated his opponents in open battle until, by mid-82 BC, he was left in sole control of Rome and Italy.

**4**. Under his supervision, the Roman Revolution plunged to new depths of depravity.

**B**. After his victory, Sulla enacted large-scale purges called "proscriptions" and revived the long-dormant office of dictator, although in modified form.

**1**. When he entered Rome in mid-82 BC, Sulla began to have his enemies (captured Samnites) executed piecemeal.

**2**. Answering appeals from the Senate for a less chaotic procedure, he organized these executions as "proscriptions," which were carried out all over Italy for almost a year.

**a**. Sulla and his supporters posted lists of the "proscribed."

**b**. People appearing on the lists could be killed for a reward.

**c**. Their property was confiscated and auctioned off at knock-down prices.

**d**. Many in Sulla's faction took the opportunity to settle old scores, or to acquire desirable real estate by proscribing its owner.

**3**. Sometime during this period (in 82 or 81 BC) Sulla was appointed dictator, an office that was out of favor and had lain dormant since the Second Punic War.

**4**. Sulla modified the dictatorship in two important respects.

**a**. He was to hold the post not for the traditional six months, but for as long as he wanted.

**b**. He took as his specific dictatorial assignment the exceptionally broad task of "writing laws and organizing the state."

**5**. Sulla then used his new power to redraft the government of Rome.

**III**. As dictator, Sulla issued legislation aimed at turning back the clock on the Revolution and restoring traditional senatorial government.

**A**. Sulla's legislation was clearly aimed at reversing the trend toward *popularis* government at Rome.

**1**. Although thoughtful, Sulla's settlement was reactionary and backward-looking.

**a**. He muzzled the tribunate and the Tribal Assembly of the Plebs: ex- tribunes were debarred from holding any other office and could not propose legislation; plebescites were subject to a senatorial veto.

**b**. He reformed the Senate, expelling many of its members, and installing newcomers loyal to himself.

**c**. He tried to prevent army commanders from doing what he had done.

**2**. He also issued other regulations of a sensible nature that were to stand for many decades, such as his establishment of permanent courts of inquiry, or the stiffening of the *cursus honorum*.

**3**. In 79 BC, his legislative program completed, Sulla resigned his dictatorship, and retired into private life; he died the following year.

**B**. Sulla's career is emblematic of the Roman Revolution as a whole.

**1**. As a person, Sulla was an odd mix of mediocrity and brilliance, indolence and action, and placidity and viciousness; he may have been a sociopath.

**2**. His career illustrates the broad nature of the Roman Revolution: personalities operating with relatively narrow vision and thereby setting dangerous precedents for the future.

**3**. Sulla reacted to circumstances as he saw fit at the time (such as marching on Rome); he gave little thought to the example he was setting.

**4**. His attempted restoration of senatorial government was doomed by the personal power politics of the Republic, which could not allow so useful a tool as the tribunate to lie in abeyance for long.

**5**. Within nine years of his death, Sulla's settlement had been completely dismantled, and the Roman Revolution moved into its final and bloodiest stages.