

Notes on Quiz #5: Crossing the Rubicon

1. How did Caesar die? What do you think were the main reasons it happened? Be specific and give examples.

Caesar was assassinated at a senate meeting by a small group of nobles led by Cassius, a former dissident whom Caesar had treated with clemency, and Brutus, who was known for his virtue (and whose ancestor had evicted Tarquin Superbus nearly 500 years before).

The motivations varied. Some, like Cassius, felt slighted by Caesar. Others, like Brutus, feared for the Republic. Caesar's reforms were entirely populist, his every action turning the people and the armies against the senate and the conservative elite. The senate had retained a pretense of control over Caesar's power as they were the ones to grant him his honors, including four successive dictatorships; but when Caesar arranged for an automatically renewing dictatorship (*dictator perpetuum*) this sense of control was lost.

2. What role does Pompey the Great play in the civil wars? How would you describe his motivations? Give examples.

After pledging himself and his illegal private army to Sulla, Pompey was then ordered to mop up Sulla's enemies, including the Marian holdout Sertorius, who controlled part of Roman Spain. He then allied with Crassus, joining him in a consulship that finished the unraveling of Sulla's pro-senate reforms. Pompey and Crassus then joined with a young Caesar to form the so-called first triumvirate, an informal union of three powerful men to control Roman politics behind the scenes.

The senate, trusting him more than Crassus and Caesar, sent him on more extraordinary commands, first to wipe out the pirates of southern Italy, then to reorganize the Roman east. Pompey's arrangements in the east were long-lasting, shaping Rome's relationship with its Hellenistic provinces for centuries to come; but his absence from Rome left it in political disorder, and Caesar strove to match his power as governor of the three Gauls. Finally, the senate called on Pompey to defend Italy against the invasion by Caesar.

Pompey is generally seen as an opportunist, using his advantages (mainly control over an army inherited from his father and the division of the nobles) to establish himself as a warlord who was not to be ignored. Though he joined with Sulla, and later fought for the senate, this was not out of loyalty to their platform, and he was just as happy to work with Crassus to dismantle Sulla's aristocratic constitution.

EC1. All of the following are true of Caesar's dictatorships (49 to 44 BCE) EXCEPT:

- ✓ (a) He was cruel and vengeful to his political opponents, refusing to extend magnanimity and clemency
- (b) His reforms included weakening the senate, debt relief, free grain, colonization, and calendar reform
- (c) He spent a lot of the time at war in Thessaly, Egypt, Africa, Spain, and elsewhere
- (d) He eventually had himself declared dictator perpetuus (dictator unending)

EC2. Whom did Crassus crucify along the Appian Way (the road to Rome), and why? What conflict resulted in this act?

When the gladiator Spartacus led a slave revolt against the Roman aristocracy, Rome had great difficulty putting it down. (This is known as the Third Servile War.) Roman troops were mostly busy in other wars away from Italy. The consuls initially assumed the revolt would be easy to quash, not apprehending quickly enough that Spartacus had amassed a great army of slaves, some with military experience. Spartacus racked up victory after victory over the Roman legions sent against them under the consuls' command.

Finally, the state commissioned Crassus to destroy the revolt. Not underestimating Spartacus as the consuls had, Crassus amassed a powerful Roman force of eight legions and used Spartacus's weaknesses against him. Pompey was still able to gain credit for Spartacus's defeat owing to a minor action, but Crassus demonstrated that the victory was of his making by subjecting 6,000 of the slave rebels to crucifixion—the ancient Roman punishment for treason. (Spartacus was not included: he died in battle but his body was not found.)

EC3. What is the significance of Caesar crossing the Rubicon? How does it change things for himself and Rome?

In 49 BCE Caesar and Pompey's increasing power as warlords personally controlling great swaths of the Roman empire led senate extremists to attempt to pass the "ultimate decree" against Caesar and have him declared a public enemy. Though vetoed by Caesar's ally Antony, who held a plebeian tribuneship that year, this move by the senate spurred Caesar to action. The tribunes were forced to flee, and Caesar used the defense of the sacred rights of the tribunes as his pretext to end the current government of Rome.

Caesar took the nearby city of Rimini, across the boundary between his province (Cisalpine Gaul) and Italy proper. This boundary was a minor river called the Rubicon. Caesar knew that this would be understood as him invading Italy, and that there was no turning back. Thus his famous use of the quote from Menander, "The die is cast."