At the heart of the Roman Republic’s power was its aristocracy. The power of the aristocracy was threatened by one individual; Julius Caesar. His invasion and conquest of Gaul extended Roman territory to the English Channel and the Rhine gaining for him unmatched military power.

Through civil war, he assumed control of the government convincing the Roman people and the Roman Senate to make him dictator for a 10 year period. During this time, Caesar instituted many reforms that made him popular with the common people. He reformed farm laws, distributed lands to soldiers who had fought with him and too many poor people. He attempted to curb slavery by passing a law that required a third of the ranch laborers to be Roman citizens. As a result of his actions, Caesar received widespread popularity. This popularity was a cause of concern for the Roman aristocracy – especially the members of the Senate – as they feared losing their power to Caesar.

Pompey was a great general who had great successes in the field. He won a series of great victories in Asia and returned to Rome in 62 to ask the Senate to approve of the territory arrangements that he had made as a result of his victories on the battlefields. Crassus, who was quite jealous of Pompey's war successes, persuaded the Senate not to approve of Pompey's plans.

Caesar, sensing an opportunity, persuaded the two consuls to work together and promised to support both of them. His price: a consulship of his own. Crassus and Pompey agreed, and 60 B.C. saw the formation of the First Triumvirate. (Pompey, who might have been suspicious of Caesar's motives at this time, was probably pacified by his new wife, who happened to be Caesar's daughter, Julia.) Caesar had also taken a new wife himself, by the name of Calpurnia.

Within a year, Caesar was true to his word: Pompey's proposals were approved, so were Crassus's and Caesar himself was granted a five-year term as proconsul of Gaul (present day France) after his tour of duty as a consul had finished.

He left for Gaul in 58 and ended up staying there for nine years. During this time, he directed great military victories but also personally killed or had killed a great many people who stood in his way. The Gaul that he conquered included what is now France, Belgium, southern Holland, Germany west of the Rhine River, and most of Switzerland.

In addition to the widespread social reforms that Caesar began, he had many other contributions to Roman life. The Julian calendar was created as a result of his reign and is still in use today. Caesar had roads built to connect his enormous empire and worked to improve the government and make business safe throughout Italy. During expansion, he founded colonies in Italy, Greece and on the spot where Carthage stood. In addition to founding the colonies, Caesar gave rights to the conquered people who lived under Roman law.
Politics in Rome became increasingly hostile while Caesar was in Gaul. Many of the leaders were jealous of Caesar and his following. Even Pompey became jealous and soon Caesar and Pompey became rivals. Caesar had the support of the people and Pompey had the support of the aristocrats.

Caesar announced that he was going to return to Rome and run for consul again. The Roman Senate replied that he must give up the command of his army first. Caesar refused and the Senate said he was a traitor. Caesar began to march his army to Rome.

Caesar took control of Rome in 49 BC and spent the next 18 months fighting Pompey. He finally defeated Pompey, chasing him all the way to Egypt. When he reached Egypt, the young Pharaoh, Ptolemy VIII, had Pompey killed and presented his head to Caesar as a gift.

**Dictator of Rome**

In 46 BC Caesar returned to Rome. He was now the most powerful man in the world. The Senate made him dictator for life and he ruled like a king. He made many changes to Rome. He put his own supporters in the Senate. He built new buildings and temples in the city of Rome. He even changed the calendar to the now famous Julian calendar with 365 days and a leap year.


Many of the Senators were concerned with Caesar’s power as well as the way that he came to power. They were concerned that he wanted to become king of Rome. Many believed that he was working towards declaring himself king and setting up a dynasty for his heirs. A group of senators decided to plot Caesar’s assassination. The group, led by Marcus Brutus (MAR-kuss BROO-tuss) and Gaius Cassius (Gy-uss KA-Shuss), plotted the murder in the name of saving the Republic.

As Caesar entered the Senate building on March 14, 44 BC a group of senators surrounded him. They attacked stabbing him with daggers 23 times and killing him.