Roman Senate

Background Guide

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Letter from the Chair:

Salvete delegates!

My name is Kate Canavan, and I am so excited to be your Presiding Magistrate (chair) of the *Senatus Romanus* (Roman Senate) committee at EagleMUNC VII. I am a sophomore majoring in Economics and Political Science. I originally hail from Connecticut—where wiffle balls and frisbees were invented, and where you can find the most delicious pizza in the country!

I am very interested in government and politics—I spent all of high school participating in government simulation programs, I'm a student government senator at BC, and I spent this past summer working in politics in Washington, D.C.. My dream in middle school was to be an archaeologist (nerdy, I know), so I am excited to be combining my interests in government and ancient history to facilitate this experience for you all in this committee. I also took Latin for four years, so hopefully my pronunciation skills are up to par! I did not become involved with Model UN until college, but being a sims staffer at EagleMUNC VII and traveling to college conferences has shown me how valuable of an experience MUN can be. By attending these conferences, you can develop your skills in public speaking, teamwork, and problem solving, all of which will serve you well in any future endeavors.

For this committee, we worked hard to simulate the proceedings of the actual *Senatus Romanus* as closely as possible. We decided to omit some practices for the sake of ensuring a positive experience for all delegates. For example, much more speaking time was given to senators with more seniority, but we want to make sure every senator gets fairs speaking time. Much of Roman rules of procedure aligns well with typical procedure for MUN general assemblies, so if you read this background guide carefully you should have no trouble following the flow of this committee.

The deliberative nature of the *Senatus Romanus* gives you the opportunity to work together and solve problems facing the Roman Republic in the first century BCE—shortly before the fall of the Republic and the rise of the Roman Empire. However, this also means there is the possibility of internal squabbling and politics hindering your ability to act effectively. Work together, not against each other, to accomplish your goals. You will not only have to deal with conflict among yourselves, but conflict between Roman social classes, and conflict with outside forces. Many of these problems are not unique to the Republic. You may notice that our society today faces similar challenges.

I hope you have as much fun in this committee as our staff has had creating this experience for you. Although it is important to try your best and work hard, you learn the most in MUN from the relationships you build and the new things you experience, not from the awards you win. Remember to have fun! If you have any questions at all, or just want to introduce yourself, feel free to email me anytime. I am so excited say *salvete* to you all at EagleMUNC VII!

Bona Fortuna (Good Luck!)

Kate Canavan

Historical Background:

The Roman Republic

Rome's existence before the founding of the Republic is largely mythological. According to the legend *The Aeneid*, by Virgil, Rome began with Aeneas and some fellow Trojans fleeing the city of Troy after accepting defeat from the Greeks. According to fate, and the will of the gods, they ultimately ended up in Latinum, which would become Rome. Romulus and Remus were twin brothers descended from Aeneas' line. When Romulus killed Remus, he founded Rome and was the first monarch. This monarchy supposedly existed until the corrupt King Tarquinius Superbus was overthrown by his nephew, Lucius Junius Brutus, and Romans began electing consuls to rule.[1] Thus, the Roman Republic began in 510 BCE. Rome would grow from a small city-state to a strong political and military force controlling much of the Mediterranean region for centuries to come.

From the beginning of the Republic, Rome was separated into patricians and plebeians. Patricians were the noblemen—these families controlled all political and spiritual institutions. Plebeians had virtually no power—at this point in time, a person's role in Roman society was determined by the family into which they were born, no matter their wealth. This societal structure was not sustainable—resentment grew, especially among plebeians who served in the military. Any gains from military victories went to the patricians, not the people who were actually risking their lives by fighting. The First Succession of the Plebeians occurred in 494 BCE, where plebeians who wanted a voice in their society's government went on strike. This led to the creation of the Council of the Plebeians, or the *Concilium Plebis*. The Roman government

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[1] Gill, N.S. "Tarquin the Proud: Last King of Rome." ThoughtCo. October 4, 2017. https://www.thoughtco.com/tarquin-the-proud-119623.

was comprised of various councils, including the Roman Senate, and the *Concilium Plebis* gained more power as the years went on. For example, the "Twelve Tables" gave plebeians more rights in Rome in 450 BCE. By 287 BCE, the *Concilium Plebis* was given ultimate legislative power. According to the Lex Hortensia, this council could pass final laws that applied to all social classes in Roman Society.

Despite political gains, the plebeians in Rome continued to suffer. Poor citizens lived in dangerous, poorly-kept apartments. The areas of the city where they lived were dark, unsanitary, and high in crime. The difference in living conditions among the wealthy and the poor, all within the same city, was stark. There were some radical reformers within the government who tried to fix this situation. For example, tribune Tiberius Gracchus's land redistribution proposal was met with significant opposition—he and hundreds of others were killed in the violent protests that followed. His brother, tribune Gaius Gracchus, supported making all allies of Rome, not just Romans themselves, citizens so they would have representation in the government. The intense backlash that followed led him to commit suicide. A few decades later, however, allies in the peninsula of Italy became citizens, despite opposition from the Roman Senate.

Struggles like this within the Republic led to its ultimate downfall. Political events like Marcus Tillius Cicero's suspicion of conspiracy and the First Triumvirate, which you will explore in this committee, exemplify the conflict within Rome that prevented the necessary stability to maintain such a large society. The rapid growth from military victories proved to be unsustainable in a representative government dealing with strife between patricians and plebeians, as well as between members of the government itself. When Julius Caesar was given the role of dictator for life, his enemies and friends assassinated him in 44 BCE. The Roman

Republic died along with Julius Caesar. His step-son ultimately ruled Rome as emperor under the name Augustus.[2]

The Roman Government

Much of what historians know about the origin of the *Senatus Romanus* is according to legend. Supposedly, Romulus created the Senate when he founded Rome and intended it to provide advice to the monarch. By the 100th century BCE, there were probably about 500 men serving in the senate. Senators were able to wear the *toga praetexta* (a special toga with a purple sash), and had other perks like prime seating at events. During this time period, meetings were usually held in the *Curia Cornelia*.[3]

The Roman government consisted of magistrates and various assemblies. Magistrates, which consisted of Consuls, Praetors, Aediles, Quaestors, Tribunes, and Censors, served one year terms. It is important to know that Consuls were the most powerful position in the Roman government. There were always two of them, and they essentially implemented all civil and military policies in Rome. Tribunes, or *tribuni plebis*, were also important. Ten tribunes represented the will of the plebeians in the Roman government and could overrule any action of other magistrates or of the *Senatus Romanus*. They could also convene the assembly of plebians which, unlike the *Senatus Romanus,* had actual lawmaking power. The Censors were the ones who chose the Senators. A dictator, who had complete unchecked power, could also be approved by the *Senatus Romanus* for a six month period.[4]

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[2] Wasson, Donald L. "Roman Republic." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. Last modified April 07, 2016. https://www.ancient.eu/Roman_Republic/.

[3] Cartwright, Mark. "Roman Senate." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. Last modified December 12, 2016. https://www.ancient.eu/Roman_Senate/.

[4] "Roman Magistrates." Ancient Roman History. Accessed July 2018. https://www.unrv.com/empire/executive-branch.php.

The fact that the *Senatus Romanus* lacked real legislative power is an important thing to keep in mind. The Roman government consisted of various committees besides the senate, including the Committee of the Hundreds (*Comitia Centuriata),* the Committee of the Tribal People (*Comitia Populi Tributa*), and the Council of the People/Plebeians (*Concilium Plebis*). These committees had the power to enact what senators decide and elect Magistrates. However, the recommendations of the *Senatus Romanus* were rarely ignored.[5]

The *Senatus Romanus* had the primary responsibility of advising the magistrates, but also handled foreign affairs like declaring war, appointing lower-level government roles, and welcoming ambassadors. Senators appointed dictators, and could also utilize the *senatus consultum ultimum,* which gave the Consuls unchecked military power for a period of time.[6]

Senate Procedure

Meetings of the *Senatus Romanus* were convened via herald in the Roman Forum. They had to occur within a mile of the city and in a temple, for example, in the *Curia Cornelia.* Meetings could be attended by Senators, Magistrates, and former Magistrates that did not have speaking or voting power. Delegates will represent Senators and Magistrates. The meetings were convened by a Magistrate, who would then preside over the meeting and set the topic of discussion (the *relatio).* The Presiding Magistrate would introduce the *relatio* and open the floor for debate in the following manner:

> *"Quod bonum felixque sit populó Rómánó Quiritium, referimus ad vós, patrés cónscriptí…"*
>
> ("Inasmuch as it may be good and fortunate for the Roman people of the Quirites, we bring before you, conscript fathers…")

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[5] "Roman Senate." Ancient Roman History. Accessed July 2018. https://www.unrv.com/empire/the-senate.php.

[6] "Ancient Roman Government Hierarchy." Hierarchy Structure. November 14, 2017. Accessed July 2018. https://www.hierarchystructure.com/ancient-roman-government-hierarchy/.

and finished the introduction with:

"*Dé eá ré quid fierí placet?*"

("What does it please you should be done about this matter?")

The Presiding Magistrate could then proceed with the topic of discussion in two ways. He could go *per discessionem*, which meant they would vote immediately, or he could open the floor for debate and then move to voting procedure by deciding to go *per relationem*. The Presiding Magistrate would call on senators by saying, "*dic, ____,*" meaning, "speak, ____." When it was time to vote, the Presiding Magistrate could require attendees to stand in different areas of the room depending on their opinion and determine the results of voting based on the size of the two groups:

"*Quí hoc cénsétis, illuc tránsite; quí alia omnia, in hanc partem.*"

("Whoever thinks this, go over there; whoever thinks anything else, to this part.")

"*Haec pars major vidétur.*"

("This part seems larger.")

The Presiding Magistrate would then end the session by saying, "*Senátum nón teneó,*" meaning, "I do not hold the Senate."

Relationes (Topics of Discussion)

Topic 1: Possibility of Conspiracy:

Around the time of the 64 BCE consul election, Rome was facing a serious economic crisis. Despite territorial gains as far as the Middle East and Northern Africa, social tension grew as government revenue decreased, many patricians went into debt, and unemployment among the plebeians grew. Many noblemen were grappling for power as the plebeians sought for more influence in this time of need. The *Senatus Romanus* had no solution to this crisis. Two rival

political leaders at the time—Marcus Tullius Cicero and Lucius Sirgius Catiline—embodied the conflict that plagued Rome during these economic hardships.[7]

Cicero was one of the most skilled orators of ancient Rome. He was a lawyer, poet, philosopher, and author. He did not come from a family of patricians, but did come from wealth. He served in the military and in various government roles before running for consul in 64 BCE. He defeated Lucius Sirgius Catiline thanks to the support of conservatives who were skeptical of Catiline's radical agenda. Much of his term as consul was occupied by this rivalry. If he suspected any threats to his power, to the safety of important senators, or to the city itself he was sure to use his network of supporters to keep him informed regarding anything suspicious.[8]

Lucius Sergius Catilina, also known as Catiline, was a patrician who served in the military and in various government roles early in his career. He was in serious debt, and championed policies that he believed would help the poor in Rome during the economic collapse. He ran for consul in 64 BCE and lost to his rival, the more conservative Cicero. He ran unsuccessfully again in 63 BCE. He supported policies like cancellation of debt, which would not only be helpful for many members of the working class, but for himself as well. Despite his political failures and the fact that his enemy Cicero was serving as consul in 63 BCE, he remained extremely popular among the working class and many political leaders. He maintained close ties with people who were hurt by previous attempts at economic reforms and many fellow noblemen. These connections gave him power, influence, and political capital.[9]

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[7] Wasson, Donald L. "Cicero & the Catiline Conspiracy." Ancient History Encyclopedia. February 03, 2016. Accessed July 2018. https://www.ancient.eu/article/861/cicero--the-catiline-conspiracy/.

[8] Balsdon, John P.V. Dacre, and John Ferguson. "Marcus Tullius Cicero." Encyclopædia Britannica. January 11, 2018. Accessed July 2018. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cicero.

[9] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Catiline." Encyclopædia Britannica. November 13, 2008. Accessed July 2018. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Catiline-Roman-politician.

Cicero delivering a speech to the *Senatus Romanus* in October 63 BCE while serving as consul[10]

The *Senatus Romanus* must balance conflict on the borders of neighboring provinces, as well as internal economic and political problems. Although many external factors are causing the strife within Rome, Senators must hold their leaders accountable. It is important to figure out who to trust, how to deal with possible threats, and how to please the citizens to the greatest extent in order to avoid a rebellion.

Topic 2: Grain Shortage:

Publius Clodius Pulcher was a patrician politician who supported policies to help the struggling plebeians in Rome. He was also a rival of Cicero, who presented evidence making him seem guilty of disguising himself as a woman to attend a ceremony at Julius Caesar's home blocked off to men. Although Clodius was not found guilty, this escalated the tensions between

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[10] Maccari, Cesare. *Cicero Denounces Catiline*. 1888. Palazzo Madama, Rome, Italy. In *Lapham's Quarterly*. https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/revolutions/art/cicero-denounces-catiline.

the two politicians.[11] Clodius planned for revenge by becoming a tribune, a magistrate that represented the plebeians who controlled the *Concillium Plebis* (Council of the Plebeians). However, he was ineligible for the role given he was a patrician. Julius Caesar, when he was consul in 59 BCE, facilitated Clodius' adoption into a plebeian family. He changed the spelling of his own name from Claudius to Clodius, and took on the role of tribune and all of its powers.[12]
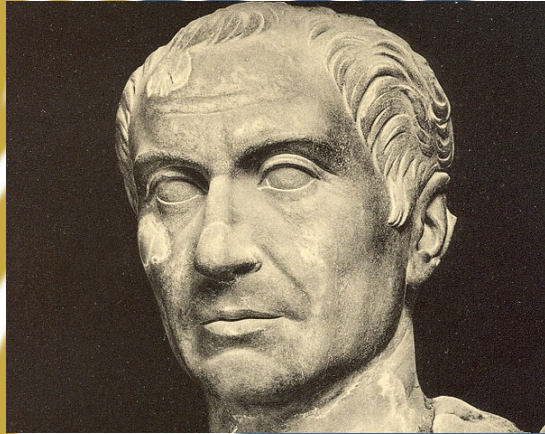
A statue of Publius Clodius Pulcher[13]

Clodius immediately began enacting robust policies to gain the support and trust of the plebeians. His *lex Clodia frumentaria* made the distribution of corn to the plebeians by the government completely free, instead of charging a small fee. He appointed Sextius Cloelius to run this program. Surprisingly, more conservative senators were not opposed to this radical change.[14] The responsibility of distributing corn was very important. Ever since 123 BCE, it was the responsibility of the *Senatus Romanus* to administer this vital program. The practice of supplying this grain to the people became known as *annona*. Similar to many other important

[11] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Publius Clodius Pulcher." Encyclopædia Britannica. September 11, 2007. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Publius-Clodius-Pulcher.

[12] "Assassination of Popularist Publius Clodius Pulcher by Milo; Mob Violence Overtakes Rome; Pompey Takes Charge." The Chronicle of the Fall of the Roman Empire. June 04, 2016. http://cof.quantumfuturegroup.org/events/5521.

[13] *Bust of Publius Clodius Pulcher*. In *History of the Ancient World*. https://www.historyoftheancientworld.com/2015/08/clodius-pulcher-caesars-willing-puppet-the-bona-dea-affair-and-its-effect-on-cicero-and-the-fall-of-the-republic-2/.

[14] Ruter III, Joseph B., "The Seed of Principate: Annona and Imperial Politics" (2016). Honors Bachelor of Arts. Paper 18. http://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/hab/18

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traditions, the Romans had a divine element to this practice as well: *annona* was also the name of the goddess of grain.[15]

The goddess Annona is depicted sitting in a chair holding grain on the right side of this coin

       Considering the godly implications of this program, the concentration of this power to a few men gave them significant political capital. Clodius and Sextius Cloelius were feeding the people for free for the first time, which earned them tremendous support among the plebeians. However, this political success was short lived. Within a year, the program proved to be unsustainable: Rome saw an influx of immigrants coming to the city solely for the free grain, and a poor harvest made it impossible to supply enough for everyone. Sextius Cloelius decided to resort to unconventional methods to try to keep the promises he and Clodius made to the people. He started threatening *negotiatores*, Roman businessmen, who bought up grain to sell to the government for a profit. The *Senatus Romanus* must consider its role in this crisis, and how to appease the starving plebeians.[16]

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[15] Struck, Peter T. "Annona." Greek & Roman Mythology. http://www.classics.upenn.edu/myth/php/tools/dictionary.php?method=did®exp=1615&setcard=0&link=0&media=0.

[16] Ruter

Topic 3: The First Triumvirate:

The First Triumvirate was an alliance between three ancient Roman politicians.[17] Gaius Julius Caesar was a Roman political and military leader. He was from a patrician family, but gained little from this status. His family was not particularly wealthy or influential. Competition for government offices was fierce - the Republican government was unstable so positions of power came with the opportunity for more power than ever before. Despite his setbacks, he sought to use his superior intellect and energy to climb the political ladder and restore stability to Rome. He held various magisterial roles before being elected consul in 59 BCE. Senators were bribed to oppose him; although efforts to prevent his ascension to this role failed, the anti-Caesarian Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus won the other consul seat. At this point, Caesar began forming political alliances to help him execute his vision and gain power.[18]

Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, known as Pompey, was a Roman politician and General from a patrician family. He spent his early career conquering land for Rome in Africa, where his troops developed a strong sense of loyalty towards him for his strong leadership. He would often use his troops to pressure political leaders, including members of the senate, to act according to his will. His ultimate goal was to overpower the inner-circle of conservative senators.[19]

Marcus Licinius Crassus was a wealthy Roman politician who served in the military early in his career. Competition with the equally ambitious Pompey led to tension between the two military leaders, and this tension grew when Pompey was recognized for quelling a slave rebellion which was actually stopped by Crassus when he was a magistrate. However, these two

[17] Wasson, Donald L. "First Triumvirate." Ancient History Encyclopedia. March 20, 2016. https://www.ancient.eu/First_Triumvirate/

[18] Toynbee, Arnold Joseph. "Julius Caesar." Encyclopædia Britannica. May 11, 2018. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Julius-Caesar-Roman-ruler.

[19] Gray, Eric William. "Pompey the Great." Encyclopædia Britannica. March 29, 2018. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pompey-the-Great.

were able to put their differences aside when they both served as consuls in 70 BCE. After their term ended, Crassus used his personal wealth to forge alliances with senators with financial difficulties, including Julius Caesar, by loaning them money.[20]
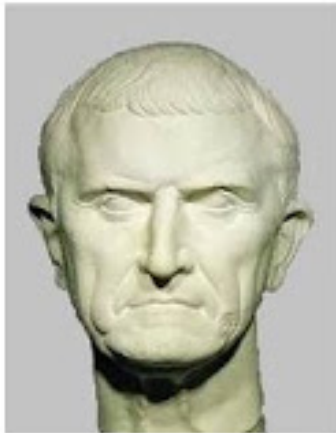
The First Triumvirate[21]

In 60 BCE, the Republic was as chaotic and unstable as ever. Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus took advantage of this instability and made a pact to support one another in their quest for glory and the First Triumvirate began. Crassus' wealth, Pompey's military skill, and Caesar's political genius helped these three men gain substantial power in the Roman government. These highly ambitious and intelligent statesmen with complicated pasts wanted wealth, fame, and glory. Caesar helped Pompey and Crassus to reconcile their differences, and Caesar himself married Pompey's daughter. Although this alliance appears to be stable, the desire for power, personal qualms, and competing interests could make this alliance unsustainable.[22]

[20] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Marcus Licinius Crassus." Encyclopædia Britannica. March 29, 2018. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marcus-Licinius-Crassus.
[21] "The First Triumvirate." Digital image. Penn State University. https://sites.psu.edu/firsttriumvirate/2013/11/06/what-is-the-first-triumvirate/.
[22] Wasson, Donald L. "First Triumvirate." Ancient History Encyclopedia. March 20, 2016. https://www.ancient.eu/First_Triumvirate/.

Bloc Positions

Optimates

The optimates, or "aristocrats," were the more traditional and conservative group of Roman patricians. They held more power in the *Senatus Romanus*, and sought to maintain the status quo of the Roman Republic. Cicero was an optimate.

Populares

The populares, or "populists," were the more radical faction of patrician political leaders. They worked against the oligarchy the optimates sought to maintain in order to protect the rights of the plebeians. Oftentimes, they sought to help themselves. Catiline and Julius Caesar were populares.[23]

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[23] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Optimates and Populares." Encyclopædia Britannica. December 13, 2016. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Optimates-and-Populares.

Questions to Consider:

Relatio **I: Potential of Conspiracy**

- How can the personal networks of both Cicero and Catiline help them gain power?

- How can Senators balance conflict with neighboring civilizations while preventing internal conflict?

- Will solving the economic crisis lead to long-term stability, or are there short-term internal problems that need to be addressed first?

Relatio **II: Grain Shortage**

- Considering the association of grain distribution with the divine, how important is this program in Roman society? How much power does the person running this program have? Is he held accountable?

- How can the *Senatus Romanus* prevent rebellions of hungry plebeians in a long-term, sustainable way?

- How should immigrants who are coming to Rome for grain be dealt with?

Relatio **III: The First Triumvirate**

- How do the different backgrounds and skill sets of the three members of the alliance contribute to their success?

- How much power can these three men gain? Are they a threat to the stability of the Republic?

- Are there weaknesses in their alliance? How can senators take advantage of these problems to try to prevent them from gaining too much power?

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