

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

THE STORM

— BEFORE —

THE STORM

THE BEGINNING
OF THE END OF THE
ROMAN REPUBLIC



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The Storm Before the Storm

About the Book Itself

1 Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus both came to violent ends pursuing economic and social reforms. Their supporters claimed they were high-minded visionaries. Their enemies said they were using demagoguery to make themselves tyrants. What do you think?

2 Chapter 6 opens with a quote from Euripides: “Why, my son, do you so long for Ambition, that worst of deities? Oh, do not; the goddess is unjust; many are the homes and cities once prosperous that she has entered and left to the ruin of her worshippers.” Ambition plays a major motivation role in the lives of the Gracchi, Marius, Sulla (and the rest). How much ambition is too much ambition? When is it better to just stay home and chill?

3 Sulla believed he saved the Republic with his reformed constitution. Why did it not work? Could anything have been done at that point to save the Republic?

4 The Romans refused to let the Italians share in equal citizenship. What reasons did they give? What could the Roman have done differently to avoid the Social War?

5 Critics of the Republic say it was a corrupt oligarchy of out of touch nobles. Supporters of the Republic say it was a exemplary exercise in shared government. What do you think? Was the Republic worth saving? Why or why not?

6. Political violence. Who introduced political violence for the first time? How was that violence used? How did the tactics and organization of armed politics evolve over the course of the book?

About Connection to America

1 The collapse of *mos maiorum* is a principle theme of the book. What are examples of recently shredded political behaviors/norms in 21st century America. Once undone can *mos maiorum* be put back together?

2 The introduction of violence as a political tool was instrumental in the fall of the Republic. Is political violence ever acceptable? Is it OK to punch a Nazi?

3 Battles over citizenship and voting for the Italians was a central issue. What issues of citizenship and voting are being debated in America today?

4 Political demagoguery—using populist appeals to attack the existing order—is becoming more prevalent. Is it always bad? Always good? What are some issues being demagogued today? What are the effects?

5 The Senate is roundly criticized for not reforming the Republic to meet the demands of the post-146 world. How is that similar or different to the 21st century US Government? Are modern leaders effectively tackling the issues of the day or are they mostly concerned with protecting their own status/privileges and engaging in clan rivalries?

Meta Questions

1 The Author's Note quotes a passage from Plutarch: "It is perhaps not to be wondered at, since fortune is ever changing her course and time is infinite, that the same incidents should occur many times, spontaneously. For, if the multitude of elements is unlimited, fortune has in the abundance of her material an ample provider of coincidences; and if, on the other hand, there is a limited number of elements from which events are interwoven, the same things must happen many times, being brought to pass by the same agencies." Are echoes and parallels between the past and present mere coincidence or is it possible that similar historical elements will naturally produce similar historical results?

2 Is the course of history shaped by large scale social and economic forces or the actions, decisions, blunders and triumphs of individuals?

3 The Romans of the later Republic often looked back to the Golden Age of the early Republic while deploring the fallen state of their own time. What do you think of the idea that society was once great but now it has fallen? Or is it that every time contains both good and bad and only a idealized version of the good part is remembered.

4 Is America Rome?