The Romans loved festivals, and their calendar contained many of them. The most famous celebrations were the Lupercalia, on February 15, and the Saturnalia, which took place from December 17 to 24. Both festivals were so popular that Christianity later adopted them under different names for its own religious calendar.

The Saturnalia celebrated Saturn, an agricultural god. (Our Saturday is named after him.) During this festival all public and private business gave way to feasting, gambling, wild dancing, and the kind of revelry that still occurs today during Mardi Gras in cities like New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro.

During the Saturnalia, masters permitted slaves to say and do what they liked; moral restrictions were eased; and Romans exchanged presents. Rather than try to abolish the Saturnalia, Christianity established December 25th as the birth date of Jesus, and the irrepressible Roman holiday, including the giving of presents, parties, and elaborate meals, became the celebration of Christmas.

The Lupercalia was dedicated, in part, to Faunus, the ancient Italian god of the countryside. Worshipped as the bringer of fertility to fields and flocks, Faunus was typically represented in art as half man, half goat and was associated with merriment like the Greek god Pan.

On the day of the Lupercalia, young male priests called Luperci sacrificed goats and a dog to Faunus. The Luperci then ran naked around the city, striking any woman who came near them with a thong cut from the skins of the sacrificed goats to render her fertile. Women who had not conceived or who wanted more children made sure that the Luperci struck them. It was at the Lupercalia of 44 B.C.E that the consul Marcus Antonius (Shakespeare's Mark Antony) offered a royal crown to Julius Caesar. In 494 C.E., the Christian church converted the festival into the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary.

- Why do you think the Romans loved these festivals? Why might the Christian Church have chosen to adapt pagan customs instead of trying to abolish them?
WOMEN'S UPRISING IN REPUBLICAN ROME

In 195 B.C.E., Roman women staged a rare public political protest when they demanded the repeal of a law passed two decades earlier during the Second Punic War, which they believed limited their rights unfairly. Levy (59 B.C.E.—17 C.E.) describes the affair and the response of the traditionalist Marcus Porcius Cato (234–149 B.C.E.).

Why did the women complains? How did they try to achieve their goals? Which of Cato's objections to their behavior do you think were most important? Since women did not vote or sit in assemblies, why did the affair end as it did?

A mid the anxieties of great wars, either scarce finished or soon to come, an incident occurred, trivial to relate, but which, by reason of the passions it aroused, developed into a violent contention. [Two] tribunes of the people, proposed to the assembly the abrogation of the Oppian law. The tribune Gaius Oppius had carried this law in the heat of the Punic War, ... that no woman should possess more than half an ounce of gold or wear a parti-coloured garment or ride in a carriage in the City or in a town within a mile thereof, except on the occasion of a religious festival ... [The Capitoline was filled with crowds of supporters and opponents of the ill. The matrons could not be kept at home by ... their husbands' orders, but blocked all the streets and approaches to the Forum, begging the men as they came down to the Forum that, in the prosperous condition of the state, when the private fortunes of all men were daily increasing, they should allow the woman too to have their former distinctions restored. The crowd of women grew larger day by day, for they were now coming in from the towns and rural districts. Soon they dared even to approach and appeal to the consuls, the praetors, and the other officers, but one consul, at least, who found himself prominent, Marcus Porcius Cato, who spoke thus in favour of the law whose repeal was being urged: "If each of us, citizens, had determined to assert his rights and dignity as a husband with 're- spect to his own spouse', we should have less trouble with the sex as a whole, as it is, our liberty, destroyed at home by female violence, even here in the Forum is crushed and trodden underfoot, and because we have not kept them individually under control, we dread them collectively... But from no class is there not the greatest danger if you permit them meetings ... and secret consultations.

"I should have said, 'What sort of practice is this, of running out into the streets and blocking the roads and speaking to other women's husbands? Could you not have made the same requisits, each of your own husband, at home? And yet, not even at home, if modesty would keep matrons within the limits of their proper rights, did it become you to concern yourselves with the question of what laws should be adopted in this place or repealed? Our ancestors permitted no woman to conduct even personal business without a guardian to intervene in her behalf, they wished them to be under the control of fathers, brothers, husbands; we [Heaven help us!] allow them now even to interfere in public affairs, yes, and to visit the Forum and our informal and formal sessions. Give loose rein to their uncontrollable nature and to this untamed creature and expect that they will themselves set bounds to their licence, unless you act, this is the least of the things enjoined upon women by custom or law and to which they submit with a feeling of injustice. It is complete liberty or, rather, if we wish to speak the truth, complete licence that they desire."

"If they win in this, what will they not attempt? Review all the laws with which your forefathers restrained their licence and made them subject to their husbands, even with all these bonds you can scarcely control them. What of this? If you suffer them to seize these bonds one by one and wrench themselves free and finally to be placed on a parity with their husbands, do you think that you will be able to endure them? The moment they begin to be your equals, they will be your superiors."

The next day an even greater crowd of women appeared in public, and all of them in a body beset the doors of those tribunes, who were vetoing their colleagues' proposal, and they did not desist until the threat of veto was withdrawn by the tribunes. There was no question that all the tribes would vote to repeal the law. The law was repealed twenty years after it was passed.


Greek and Latin literature as his subject matter. He also taught dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Sometimes he included the elements of rhetoric, especially for those boys who would not go on to a higher education.

At sixteen, some boys went on to advanced study in rhetoric. The instructors were usually Greek. They trained their charges by studying models of fine speech of the past and by having them write, memorize, and declaim speeches suitable for different occasions. Sometimes the serious student attached himself to some famous public speaker to learn what he could. Sometimes a rich Roman would support a Greek philosopher in his own home. His son could converse with the philosopher and acquire the learning and polished thought necessary for the fully cultured gentle-

Education for Women Though the evidence is limited, we can be sure that girls of the upper classes received an education equivalent at least to the early stages of a boy's education. They were probably taught by tutors at home rather than going to school, as was increasingly the fashion among boys in the late republic. Young women did not study with philosophers and rhetoricians, for they were usually married by the age at which the men were pursuing their higher education. Still, some women continued their education and became prosé writers or poets. By the first century C.E., there were apparently enough learned women to provoke the complaints of a crotchety and conservative satirist:

Still more exasperating is the woman who begs as soon as she sits down to dinner, to discourse on poets and poetry, comparing Virgil with Homer; professors, critics, lawyers, auctioneers—even another woman—can't get a word in. She rambles on at such a rate that you'd think that all the pots and pans were crashing to the floor or that every bell in town was clanging. All by herself she makes as much noise as some primitive tribe chasing away an eclipse. She should learn the philosopher's lesson: "moderation is necessary even for intellectuals." And, if she still wants to appear educated and eloquent, let her dress as a man, sacrifice to men's gods and bath in the men's baths. Wives shouldn't try to be public speakers; they shouldn't use rhetorical devices; they shouldn't read all the classics—there should be some things women don't understand. I myself cannot understand a woman who can quote the rules of grammar and never make a mistake and cites obscure, long-forgotten poets—as if men cared about such things. If she has to correct somebody let her correct her girl friends and leave her husband alone. (See also "Women's Uprising in Republican Rome."

The independent family farm was the backbone both of the Greek polis and of the early Roman Republic. Rome's conquests, the long wars that kept the citizen-soldier away from his farm, and the availability of great numbers of slaves at a low price, however, badly undercut the traditional way of farming and with it the foundations of republican society. In the following passage, Plutarch describes the process of agricultural change and the response to it of the reformer Tiberius Gracchus, tribune in 133 BCE.

Why did Roman farmers face troubles? What were the social and political consequences of the changes in agricultural life? What solution did Tiberius Gracchus propose? Why, besides selfishness and greed, did people oppose his plan?

Of the territory which the Romans won in war from their neighbours, a part they sold, and a part they made common land, and assigned it for occupation to the poor and indigent among the citizens, on payment of a small rent into the public treasury. And when the rich began to offer larger rents and drove out the poor, a law was enacted forbidding the holding by one person of more than five hundred acres of land. For a short time this enactment gave a check to the rapacity of the rich, and was of assistance to the poor, who remained in their places on the land which they had rented and occupied the allotment which each had held from the outset. But later on the neighbouring rich men, by means of fictitious personages, transferred these rentals to themselves, and finally held most of the land openly in their own names. Then the poor, who had been ejected from their land, no longer showed themselves eager for military service, and neglected the bringing up of children, so that soon all Italy was conscious of a dearth of freemen, and was filled with gangs of foreign slaves, by whose aid the rich cultivated their estates, from which they had driven away the free citizens.

And it is thought that a law dealing with injustice and rapacity so great was never drawn up in milder and gentler terms. For men who ought to have been punished for their disobedience and to have surrendered with payment of a fine the land which they were illegally enjoying, these men it merely ordered to abandon their just acquisitions upon being paid their value, and to admit into ownership of them such citizens as needed assistance. But although the restitution of the wrong was so considerate, the people were satisfied to let bygones be bygones if they could be secure from such wrong in the future; the men of wealth and substance, however, were led by their greed to hate the law, and by their wrath and contentiousness to hate the lawgiver, and tried to dissuade the people by alleging that Tiberius was introducing a redistribution of land for the confusion of the body politic, and was stirring up a general revolution.

Tiberius understood the danger he would face if he stepped down from the tribunate, so he announced his candidacy for a second successive term, striking another blow at tradition. His opponents feared he might go on to hold office indefinitely, to dominate Rome in what appeared to them a demagogic tyranny. They concentrated their fire on the constitutional issue, the deposition of the tribune. They appear to have had some success, for many of Tiberius's supporters did not come out to vote. At the elections a riot broke out, and a mob of senators and their clients killed Tiberius and some three hundred of his followers and threw their bodies into the Tiber River. The Senate had put down the threat to its rule, but at the price of the first internal bloodshed in Roman political history.
Sallust on Factions and the Decline of the Republic

Sallust (86-35 B.C.E.) was a supporter of Julius Caesar and of the political faction called populares, translated here as “the democratic party,” opponents of the optimates, translated here as “the nobility.” In this selection from his monograph on the Jugurthine War, Sallust tries to explain Rome’s troubles in the period after the destruction of Carthage in 146 B.C.E.

Why did Sallust think the destruction of Carthage marked the beginning of the decline of the Roman Republic? Does his account of events seem fair and dispassionate? How would a member of “the nobility” have evaluated the same events? Is the existence of factions or “parties” inevitably harmful to republic?

The division of the Roman state into warring factions, with all its attendant vices, had originated some years before, as a result of peace and of that material prosperity which men regarded as the greatest blessing. Down to the destruction of Carthage, the people and Senate shared the government peaceably and with due restraint, and the citizens did not compete for glory or power, fear of its enemies preserved the good morals of the state. But when the people were relieved of this fear, the favourite vices of prosperity—licence and pride—appeared as a natural consequence. Thus the peace and quiet which they had longed for in time of adversity proved, when they obtained it, to be even more grievous and bitter than the adversity. For the nobles started to use their position, and the people their liberty, to gratify their selfish passions, every man snatching and seizing what he could for himself. So the whole community was split into parties, and the Republic, which hitherto had been the common interest of all, was torn asunder. The nobility had the advantage of being a close-knit body, whereas the democratic party was weakened by its loose organization, its supporters being dispersed among a huge multitude. One small group of oligarchs had everything in its control alike in peace and war—the treasury, the provinces, public offices, all distinctions and triumphs. The people were burdened with military services and poverty, while the spoils of war were snatched by the generals and shared with a handful of friends. Meanwhile, the soldiers’ parents or young children, if they happened to have a powerful neighbour, might well be driven from their homes. Thus the possession of power gave unlimited scope to ruthless greed, which violated and plundered everything, respecting nothing and holding nothing sacred, till finally it brought about its own downfall. For the day came when noblemen rose to power who preferred true glory to usurious dominion; then the state was shaken to its foundations by civil strife, as by an earthquake.

The tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus changed Roman politics. Heretofore Roman political struggles had generally been struggles for honor and reputation between great families or coalitions of such families. Fundamental issues were rarely at stake. The revolutionary proposals of Tiberius, however, and the senatorial resort to bloodshed created a new situation. Tiberius’s use of the tribunate to challenge senatorial rule encouraged imitation despite his failure. From then on, Romans could pursue a political career that was not based solely on influence within the aristocracy, pressure from the people might be an effective substitute. In the last century of the republic, politicians who sought such backing were called populares, whereas those who supported the traditional role of the Senate were called optimates, or “the best men.”

These groups were not political parties with formal programs and party discipline, but they were more than merely vehicles for the political ambitions of unorthodox politicians. Fundamental questions—such as those about land reform, the treatment of the Italian allies, the power of the assemblies versus the power of the Senate, and other problems—divided the Roman people, from the time of Tiberius Gracchus to the fall of the republic. Some popular leaders, of course, were cynical self-seekers who used the issues only for their own ambitions. Some few may have been sincere advocates of a principled position. Most, no doubt, were a mixture of the two, like most politicians in most times. (See “Sallust on Factions and the Decline of the Republic.”)

Gaius Gracchus The tribunate of Gaius Gracchus (brother of Tiberius) was much more dangerous than that of Tiberius. All the tribunes of 123 B.C.E. were his supporters, so there could be no veto, and a recent law permitted the reelection of tribunes. Gaius’s program appealed to a variety of groups. First, he revived the agrarian commission, which had been allowed to lapse. Because there was not enough good public land left to meet the demand, he proposed to establish new colonies: two in Italy and one on the old site of Carthage. Among other popular acts, he put through a law stabilizing the price of grain in Rome, which involved building granaries to guarantee an adequate supply.

Gaius broke new ground in appealing to the equestrian order in his struggle against the senate. The equestrians [so called because they served in the Roman cavalry] were neither peasants nor senators. Some were businesspeople who supplied goods and services to the Roman state and collected its taxes. Almost continuous warfare and the need for tax collection in the provinces had made many of them rich. Most of the time, these wealthy men had the same outlook as the Senate, generally, they used their profits to purchase land and to try to reach senatorial rank themselves. Still, they had a special interest in Roman expansion and in the exploitation of the provinces. In