Brothers in Law:
The Proposed Gracchan Land Reform of the Second Century BCE and the Environment of Growing Social Inequality

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In the second century BCE, the newly-expansive Roman Republic saw the rise and fall of the brothers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, grandsons of the conqueror of Carthage, Scipio Africanus. The primary political platform of both men during their years as tribunes was a land reform aimed at shifting the growing population of hungry and generally unemployed plebeians away from the city and onto public land outside of the city, *ager publicus*. They also hoped to encourage them to revert to the more traditional role as small farmers, which plebeians had assumed in the early Republic. While a sound plan in theory, the land reform encountered serious obstructions to its implementation, not least among which was the fact that land that was *officially* public had de facto claimants that were understandably disinclined to give up the lands they had inhabited and improved over the course of many years. The policies, political careers and lives of both tribunes ended when friction between the Gracchi and the senatorial class, who stood to lose wealth as a result of the land reform, spiraled out of control into a deadly scenario of sensationalism, extreme factionalism and mistrust. This paper will examine the social environment into which the Gracchi stepped as tribunes, and it will argue that the proposed land reform, the senatorial reaction against it, and the series of events that played out in the years to come were all indicative of much more deeply-rooted social, political and even military issues in the late Republic. It will also argue that the political actions taken by the brothers, while progressive and occasionally bordering on radical, would have addressed and potentially ameliorated those issues, and that their policies were interpreted as revolutionary by the senatorial class only because of its greed and the threat to its wealth that came with the prospect of land redistribution.

I. Plebian Problems

The existing distribution of land at the time of the coming of age of the Gracchi was problematic—at least for the population of poor Romans that had grown in the city, and for the government that had to expend resources to support them. Plutarch, biographer and historian of the late first and early second century of the Common Era, wrote that the government's policy for the *ager publicus* was initially in favor of the small landholder, that the "common land they assigned to those of the citizens who were poor and landless, on payment of a small rent into the public treasury."[1] What was a sound theory fell apart in practice: by the early third century, wealthy aristocrats in Rome had driven the poor off the land and into the city by offering larger rents, and despite the Senate capping the amount of land one individual could claim in 367, the owners of large estates, the *latifundia*, continued to find ways around the law and grew their holdings.[2]

The significance of land as opposed to other kinds of material wealth in Ancient Rome must be taken into account. In a study of the contribution of unequal land distribution to social unrest in the late Republic, P.A. Brunt wrote that, "land was the safest investment, and the chief basis of wealth."[3] Brunt

[1] Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Tiberius Gracchus." tr. John Dryden. *Readings in Ancient History,* Eds. Bailkey and Lim. 2002. p. 336.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Brunt, P.A. "The Army and the Land in the Roman Revolution." *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 52. 1962. p. 69.

goes on to explain that, "in the economic life of ancient Italy agriculture was of dominant importance."[4] Those without land wanted it above all, and as is made clear by Plutarch, those who had it wanted more. Land was capital, and the wealth built upon that capital gave landowners the ability to acquire more capital, and thereby build more wealth. However, as is the case even in modern economies, there was very little opportunity for those without capital to increase their wealth on the scale to which those with established capital foundations could. The result of this, as Plutarch suggests, was a widening gap between the rich and the poor, and a growth in the population of disenfranchised city-dwellers, and Plutarch was not the only one to make note. The historian Appian, also writing in the second century CE, wrote that, "the powerful citizens became immensely wealthy and the slave class all over the country multiplied."[5]

The citizens who were pushed off their land were left unemployed due in part to the *latifundia*'s overwhelming reliance upon slave labor. Plutarch writes that in the second century, Italy "swarmed with gangs of foreign slaves. These the rich used in cultivating the lands from which they had driven the free citizens."[6] The reason for the dependence on slave labor is simple: it was cheaper than paying a citizen to work, and slaves were in abundance during that time—nearing the end of a period of extensive conquest. Roman sources writing on the agricultural situation of Italy focus not on the economy, but rather on how best to exploit one's estate—and, not surprisingly, slave labor was the most profitable option for the landholder.[7] Appian suggests another explanation for landowners' reluctance to use free citizen labor: "because free laborers might be drafted from agriculture into the army."[8] Appian's argument can be applied to the state of affairs preceding appearance of the Gracchi only if non-landholding citizens were eligible to serve in the military at that time, which—at least officially—they were not. While the armies of the early Republic consisted only of the landed citizenry, land requirements were relaxed in the late Republic, but that relaxation was not officially instated until the Marian reforms of 107 BCE,[9] 14 years after the death of Gaius Gracchus, so Appian's argument appears to hold little sway.

In any case, the result of such heavy use of slave labor can be equated to a stagnation of wealth in the hands of aristocrats. Instead of wage-earning Romans creating a stronger economy, the employment opportunities for free Romans shrunk. Brunt argues that it is very likely that for Roman plebs, "agricultural labour was not so much irksome as simply inadequate."[10] Here, the "inadequacy" Brunt identifies is most probably in reference to a wage that was too meager to survive on—but this inadequacy is in all likelihood due to estate owners' unwillingness to pay free Romans a living wage when slave labor was so abundant and affordable, and due to the fact that farm labor was only a seasonal option. While there must have been the occasional exception, Romans could not expect to make a living laboring on the *latifundia* as long as the status quo dictated that the vast proportion of laborers were slaves.

Doing away with slave labor simply to provide underemployed plebs with a living wage would certainly never have gained support—nor would anyone expect it to, as the slave was the basis of the growth in wealth and luxury for the aristocratic class of the late Republic. Therefore, the rationale of the Gracchan plan is clarified and reinforced. However, therein lies the root of a key problem encountered by the Gracchi: the land around Rome, while it was *ager publicus*, had been absorbed by the wealthy—legally or otherwise. These aristocrats, as we will see, were individuals who were both unwilling to give in to a

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Appian, *The Civil Wars*, "On the Gracchi." *Ancient History Sourcebook*, ¶ 1.
[6] Plutarch, Ibid.
[7] Brunt, 71.
[8] Appian, ¶ 2.
[9] Brunt, 74.
[10] Ibid, 70.

plan for redistribution, and had the political influence to be a thorn in the side to anyone who tried to take it from them.

II. Furthermore, a Socio-Military Issue

A change in Roman military practices, institutions and tradition were both causes and effects of the state of crisis into which the Gracchi were thrust. The issue regarding land ownership and service in the army has already been touched upon, but there is more to this subject than the question of who was allowed to serve. Lengthening campaigns, a change in the makeup of the armies, and a change in the soldiers' value systems all played a part in the shifting social outlook, and contributed to the growing undertones of a state of emergency in the late Republic.

The long campaigns that Rome waged leading up to the second century—while successful and expansive—were a catalyst to the growth of the *latifundia* and the accompanying growth of the gap between the rich and the poor. Henry Boren, in his sweeping work on the Gracchi and their policies, describes the result of a break in the tradition of Roman armies campaigning only in the summer in favor of drawn-out terms of service in Spain, Macedonia and elsewhere, in the century leading up to the appearance of the Gracchi,

> The long absence of the head of a farm household, especially when the wife and children were unable to work the land, often meant the loss or ruin of the farm…Those who did come back with money in their belts often preferred to set themselves up in business in the cities rather than return to their forlorn heritages.[11]

The "forlorn heritages" about which Boren writes must have seemed ripe for the picking by the heads of the *latifundia*, which had the means and the impetus to absorb into their own holdings great swaths of land suitable for cultivation. Moreover, the "ready market for land" Boren goes on to describe created a situation conducive to the returning-soldier type giving in to large buyout offers from aristocrats. [12] Landowners were giving up on their holdings, both through abandonment and by the prospect of monetary gain. They did this in favor of a city-dwelling life.

Interestingly, Boren relates a story indicating that even men who held high rank could see their land wealth vanish while off on campaign:

> During [the consul Regulus's] absence for a year in Africa the steward of his farm of seven *iugera* had died; his hired man had run away with the farm stock, and his wife and children were in danger of starvation. Such must have been the fate, not of a consul and a noble in the third century, but of many a peasant in the second and first centuries. Thus, even when the legionary was a man of some property, army service would soon reduce him to the same economic level as his proletarian comrades.[13]

To reiterate Boren's point, small landholders could see their property vanish while away at war, and not even relatively "wealthy" landowners, or even political officers, were safe. If *consuls* had to worry about the continuing existence and productivity of their small farms, it is easy to see that plebeians had great cause for concern.

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[11] Boren, Henry, *The Gracchi*. 1968. p. 21.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Brunt, 75.

The shrinking landowner class indicated and further fostered a shift in the composition of the traditional army of the early Republic. According to Plutarch, relocated plebs "thus deprived of their farms, no longer registered for service in war."[14] Because of this, and because of the fact that Rome's borders had grown so expansive that a predominantly citizen-based army was no longer a feasible option to fill the ranks, the structure of Roman armies underwent a drastic change. The Rome of the late Republic did not field a "citizen-army of sturdy yeomen"[15] as it had in the early years of the Republic, but rather a conscripted army of Italians. Indeed, Vellius Paterculus gives a figure that before 90 BCE, two-thirds of Roman armies were drawn from the Italian allies.[16] The ramifications of that shift are very relevant, not just to the situation of the second century BCE but for the centuries to come.

The seeds of the great civil wars among ambitious generals like Pompey and Caesar were sewn as the ideals of the soldiers of the Roman army shifted away from traditional values, a result of reliance upon non-landed and Italian military personnel. When considering the possible manifestations of political and social unrest, civil war must top the list. The revolutionary path toward civil war upon which Rome was set in the time of the Gracchi had little impact on the lives of the tribunes themselves, but their plan addressed some of the causes of civil unrest—and had the potential to nip such revolutionary tendencies in the bud.

Romans of the early Republic praised men that were good soldiers, but in their minds, good soldiery went hand-in-hand with land ownership, hard work and living with minimalist ideals. Traditionally, those regarded as "good Romans" attributed military success and social stability "to the qualities of character instilled in them by the *mos maiorum*—the ancestral way of life that subordinated the individual to the religious and social traditions of the family, state, and gods."[17] This way of life was rooted to a large degree in land ownership. When Rome was in its infancy, citizen militias would fight not for material gain, but to protect their land and families, and ensure that their existence as Romans would continue. Plutarch wrote of Marcus Cato, the statesman of the second century BCE who is identified as having retained traditional values,

> …for his part he thought that a more honorable thing than the possession of gold was the conquest of its possessors. Cato would go away with his mind full of these things, and on viewing again his own house and lands and servants and mode of life, would increase the labors of his hands and lop of his extravagancies…[18]

Plutarch makes it clear that the turnip-eating Cato adhered to the ideals of the "old way;" he was hardworking and had no interest in excessive wealth, or even wealth at all. It is true that Plutarch was writing many generations after the death of Cato, and the anecdotes that Plutarch relates may be embellished, but that is further proof that the traditional system of values with which Cato is associated was well respected and fondly remembered—one can go so far as to say "idealized"—by the Romans of the late Republic.

As "ideal" as Cato's values were, they were not practiced by the poor, city-dwelling Roman soldiers who had no land to call their own, and who therefore had a changing sense of loyalty. Brunt writes that the soldier of the late Republic, dispossessed of land and often without hope for making a living after his discharge, "was apt to feel more loyalty to his commander than to whatever government could claim

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[14] Plutarch, 336.
[15] Bailkey, Nels and Richard Lim, "The Republic at the Crossroads," *Readings in Ancient History*. p. 335.
[16] Brunt, 73-74.
[17] Bailkey, 325.
[18] Plutarch. "Life of Marcus Cato," *Readings in Ancient History*. p. 326.

legitimate authority at Rome."[19] This may be due to the fact that the generals could make promises of spoils through conquest, or even a grant of land upon discharge, while through the existing system, returning soldiers could generally expect to return to poverty. For reasons that have already been argued, land may have been the better and more persuasive of the two offers—but in any case, the potential to improve one's financial situation was all a soldier needed to fall under the general's sway. In this way, the general could build himself an army of men who served him, rather than Rome. Brunt continues with the point that the strongest motive for the soldier was the prospect of material gain, and goes on to mention that at Caesar's triumph in 46 BCE, he "gave each veteran 5,000 or 6,000 *denarii*."[20] Moreover, Brunt concludes simply that, "republican soldiers did not show such a zest for civil wars as the professional armies in AD 68-9 and later."[21] This evidence, while from the century following the Gracchi, should not lose credence with respect to the second century. It is a direct contradiction to the Catonian ideal, and proof that Roman values changed drastically nearing the end of the second century. This is not necessarily a crisis in its own right, but the ideals of Roman soldiers were no longer those with which the early Republic found success.

The Gracchan land reform, had it been implemented to its full effect, would have rendered service to the generals of the first century far less appealing. The unemployed soldiers who became the base of support for Caesar, Sulla, Antony and others would have less reason to be enticed by promises of wealth and land if they had wealth and land of their own. To be fair, this summation does not take the aristocracy into account, and one must be careful when considering hypothetical series of events, because it is impossible to predict other sources of conflict that may have arisen out of fully implemented reforms. However, working under the assumption (for now) that the aristocracy withheld support for the Gracchi out of greed, and had personal interests at heart rather than the interests of the Republic, to say that the Gracchan reforms could have alleviated some of the social unrest that led to the civil wars is a reasonable conclusion.

III. <u>The Italian Question Illuminates Gracchan Motivations</u>

It is clear that the Italian allies played a major role in the survival and propagation of the Republic, especially from a military standpoint. As asserted above, filling the ranks of the army with only "Roman" soldiers was impossible during extended campaigns in several far-flung theaters. Thus, it is obvious that Italians fought and died for the Republic of the second century—to a greater extent than Romans themselves, if primary and modern source estimates are accurate. However, the degree to which the Gracchan reforms would have *benefited* those Italians is disputed, even between Plutarch and Appian. In taking the two sources into account, one must come to the conclusion that the Gracchi had the interest of the Republic at heart in making efforts toward land reform.

First, it is important to note that someone considered Roman was a full citizen, the population of which was densest around the city itself. Latins and Italians were from various Roman holdings throughout the peninsula, and had varying degrees of social and political rights in the eyes of the Republic. Plutarch gives the impression that the land law would benefit only citizens, or at least frames it that way in his writing. "The Life of Tiberius Gracchus" indicates that *ager publicus* was to be distributed "among the citizens," and he quotes Tiberius directly, "…not one of all these many Romans [has] an ancestral tomb, but they fight and die to support others in wealth and luxury…and they have not a single clod of earth to call their own."[22] The fact that he uses the words "Roman" and "citizen" instead of "Italian" or "Latin" must be intentional. In his study of the Italian Question, J.S. Richardson identifies a

[19] Brunt, 76.
[20] Ibid, 77, 79.
[21] Ibid, 82.
[22] Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives*, "The Life of Tiberius Gracchus." Vol. X, Loeb Classical Library Edition Online. ¶ 9.4.

few details in Plutarch's writing that hint upon the reforms having a pan-Italian target, but he writes, "They can carry very little weight against the overwhelmingly 'Roman' view of Gracchus' measure that is clear in Plutarch's whole account."[23] The merit of this argument, as Richardson points out, is political:

> Unless we are to believe that the Gracchans were acting for purely altruistic motives, it is difficult to avoid concluding that the main beneficiaries of the law were Romans who could first pass the measure and afterwards show their gratitude in both the tribal and centuriate assemblies.[24]

The individuals who could "pass the measure" to which Richardson refers are the voting citizen class of full Romans.

Appian, in contrast, contends that the Italians were included not just in the plan for *re*distribution of *ager publicus*, but in the original distribution practices as well. Many passages in his writing support this assertion. Appian states that the original rental scheme for the public land was meant to "increase the Italian peoples, considered the hardest working of races."[25] He also claims that Tiberius, introducing his land reform, made "an eloquent speech… on the subject of the Italian race, deploring that…[they] were gradually sinking into pauperism and decreasing in numbers, with no hope of betterment."[26] If Appian's account is correct, we can infer that Tiberius had a great amount of respect for the Italians—and he realized that Roman expansion and maintenance of the Republic's conquests would not be possible without a landholding class of Italian allies.

Synthesizing the two sources on the subject of the Italian Question leads to a deeper understanding of the purpose of the land reform. Any action—especially a political one—does not necessarily have only a single motivation. If we assume that the Gracchi were not acting for "purely altruistic motives" (which is as valid an assumption about the politicians of the second century BCE as it is for those of today), it does not mean that they were entirely motivated by the popularity and political support they could win by appealing to the mass of poor citizens, either. Plutarch's account, in which land reform would decidedly apply only to citizens, implies a political rationale. Appian's account, meanwhile, implies a social rationale in which the reason for land reform is a backlash against a growing slave class and the decline in population of the hardworking and hard-fighting Italian races—those who likely made up the majority of Roman legions.

The true motivation of the Gracchi must lie somewhere between these two extremes, and it is the conclusion of this paper that the intention of the *lex agraria* tends much more toward social improvement than toward a simple campaign for high public opinion. For the sake of argument, if we say Appian's account is "right," we assume the Gracchi were acting for aims beyond political popularity—otherwise they would have pandered to only the citizen plebs—and so we must conclude that their aim was social: to encourage the re-proliferation of the farmer/soldier class (citizen or not) and to suppress the growth of the slave class. We have no reason not to believe that those ends were what the Gracchi thought were in the best interest of the Republic, and to that point, Appian says outright, "what Gracchus sought in framing the law was the increase, not of wealth, but of serviceable population."[27] If instead we say Plutarch's account is right, it is easier to claim that the plan for land reform was just a cry for public support. However, there were other, simpler ways to earn that support, as Gaius Gracchus demonstrated

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[23] Richardson, J.S. "The Ownership of Roman Land: Tiberius Gracchus and the Italians." *The Journal of Roman Studies,* Vol. 70. p. 2.
[24] Ibid, 5.
[25] Appian, ¶ 1.
[26] Ibid, ¶ 3.
[27] Appian, ¶ 5.

by "buying the plebs," and therefore buying a second term as tribune, with his grain dole.[28] Through Plutarch, too, we must assume that, because of the nature of the Gracchan proposition, and because it was fostered by the people "calling upon him"[29] for a change, the social motivation outweighs the political motivation.

The fact is that both accounts exist, and the variation between the two otherwise trustworthy sources gives the modern reader pause. Perhaps the disparity is due to Plutarch and Appian writing for their own political purposes, or in support of the purposes of others. There is also the chance that there was confusion among the people (including the two biographers) at the time about the letter of the law, or that a change in the plan for the law between its conception and its passage accounts for the difference. The former of these two possibilities is more likely than the latter. Richardson refutes the first hypothesis due to the logic that the sources would have "seized upon only one stage with apparently no awareness that there was ever an alternative."[30] This rebuttal is reinforced when taking into account that both primary sources were produced hundreds of years after the tribunates of the Gracchi, and one would expect some sort of agreement about the "final product" so many years later if there was a change of plans—especially because the biographers could not have *personally* been aware of any changes as they were being made.

For the purpose of this paper, though, it is decided that the "true" motivation of the Gracchi and the accuracy of the details of their law are far less important than the fact that, again, the *lex agraria* was not a ploy for public support—such support was the effect of the policy. The Gracchi were concerned with the well-being of increasingly unemployed plebeians (or plebeians *and* Italians, as the case may have been), and could have restored the social and military fabric of the Republic. Evidence for this conclusion can be found in *both* Plutarch and Appian, so the discrepancy with regard to the Italian Question that is present between the two are negligible when considering the end the agrarian law aimed to achieve: a return of the lower class to its traditional role.

IV. Aristocratic Reactions and Implications

The *lex agraria*, while decidedly beneficial to the Republic as a society, was not without its short-term "winners" and "losers," and was therefore not universally supported, especially not by those who had the power to stand in its way. Those who had worked around the land limits and amassed great holdings of *ager publicus* were in danger of having their estates broken up. While some *latifundia* were established and grown by extra-legal means, the aristocrats who owned them were not completely unjustified in their opposition to the law. Their shortsighted and outspoken opposition, though, led to accusations of revolution on the part of Tiberius, and eventually led to the senators' justification of resorting to violence—despite the fact that Tiberius' actions often had more revolutionary precedents.

Appian and Plutarch agree on the charge that landowners were not eager to support the new law and relinquish their often ill-gotten lands, even upon offer of compensation. Appian writes that no respect was paid to the original limit of 500 *iugera* (about 300 acres), and that the *lex agraria* "greatly vexed the wealthy, because…they could no longer pass by the [land limits] as they had done before."[31] Plutarch writes that, despite the first iteration of the law being a very moderate one, in which those giving up land would be compensated for their losses, a hatred for the law grew within the aristocrats as a result of their greed.[32] The aristocrats' reactions are not surprising, as they were simply acting out of self-interest. As Appian pointed out, not only did the average landholder think that he would never be

[28] Ibid, ¶ 18.
[29] Plutarch, Loeb Classical Library Edition, ¶ 8.7.
[30] Richardson, 3.
[31] Appian, ¶ 4.
[32] Plutarch, Loeb Classical Library Edition, ¶ 9.3.

ousted, but some made claims that the lands that were being taken away had become deeply tied to their own families:

> [Landholders] declared that the graves of their fathers were in the ground that had been assigned to them in the partition of their family estate. Others stated that their wives' dowries had been spent on the land or that it had been given to their own daughters as such…All sorts of complaints and denunciations were heard at the same time.[33]

While surely there must have been some truth to this passage, it is as likely now as it was then that those who opposed a law would cry out against it with grossly exaggerated complaints, or even downright lies. Furthermore, the aristocrats looked to the tribune Marcus Octavius to oppose Tiberius, through whom they could impose the strongest *political* countermeasure to the agrarian reform, as "the wishes of the majority avail not if one tribune is in opposition."[34] It is clear that the aristocrats did not support land reform, but identifying the senators themselves as a source of opposition, instead of just the wealthy in general, is an important distinction, and Plutarch makes that distinction for us. Upon debating the agrarian law, "the senate in its session accomplished nothing, owing to the prevailing influence of the wealthy class in it."[35] Plutarch even suggests that opposition was so strong that Tiberius feared for his own life. He writes that the men of property "in secret…plotted against the life of Tiberius…so that Tiberius on his part—and everybody knew it—wore a concealed short sword."[36]

This is not to say that greed on the part of the landholding class was the *only* hindrance to the agrarian reform. Boren indicates that *ager publicus* newly added to the public domain was occasionally left in the possession of its original Italian occupants, un-surveyed and with the land tax not collected upon it. Moreover, the plots could change hands among many unofficial tenants in the years following its designation as public land, without the knowledge of government institutions or regard to land laws.[37] As if the prospect of removing longstanding tenants from their land was not a task enough, the confusion over property lines and illegal (yet popularly honored) changes of possession created a logistical nightmare. However, while we can see that Tiberius "was to have his troubles" in *administering* the law, upset Italian tenants and overworked land surveyors were not the ones stirring up accusations of revolution against Tiberius. So, again, we turn back to the senatorial class and their vehement opposition to the redistribution of land.

The opposition of the aristocrats brought on accusations of revolution—accusations that would only increase as Tiberius gained popular support for his agrarian reform. Plutarch is most direct in illuminating this point. He wrote that the rich not only hated the law, but they grew to "hate the law-giver, and tried to dissuade the people by alleging that Tiberius was introducing a re-distribution of land for the confusion of the body politic, and was stirring up a general revolution."[38] This sentiment must have grown as Tiberius assumed his second term as tribune, and we can use the occasion of the death of Tiberius as evidence for that conclusion. The gesture that incited a senatorial mob to final action against Tiberius and his followers—Tiberius' gesture to his own head, indicating, as Plutarch writes, that his life was in danger—was interpreted by those who opposed him as a request for a crown.[39] If that is true, and Appian corroborates the account, there must have been an existing environment of deepening hatred and mistrust of Tiberius. It seems that the senators were looking for any excuse to bring violence against the

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[33] Appian, ¶ 4.
[34] Plutarch, Loeb Classical Library Edition, ¶ 10.2.
[35] Ibid, ¶ 11.2.
[36] Ibid, ¶ 4.7.
[37] Boren, 52.
[38] Plutarch, Loeb Classical Library Edition, ¶ 9.3.
[39] Ibid, ¶ 19.2.

tribune, especially if what Plutarch says is true and they had already plotted against his life. If Tiberius' intention was truly to make himself king, the senators' action would indeed be justified, but acceding to kingship was decidedly *not* his intention.

Tiberius' clash with Octavius was a radical measure, but it was not revolutionary, and it was a far more justified and peaceful removal of an officer than there is evidence of in the years preceding him. When Tiberius realized that Octavius would not end his opposition, Tiberius brought him before the assembly, and votes against him prompted a change in Octavius' position, or even an impeachment of the tribune, as Appian indicates.[40] In the twenty years before Tiberius' time as tribune, there were two instances of tribunes *imprisoning* consuls in reaction to senatorial actions.[41] A vote before the tribes of the assembly is a far more civil and just resolution than simple imprisonment. Moreover, Tiberius justified his actions to the assembly:

> A tribune, he said, was sacred and inviolable, because he was consecrated to the people and was a champion of the people. "If, then," said Tiberius, "he should change about, wrong the people, maim its power, and rob it of the privilege of voting, he has by his own acts deprived himself of his honourable office by not fulfilling the conditions on which he received it; for otherwise there would be no interference with a tribune even though he should try to demolish the capitol or set fire to the naval arsenal. If a tribune does these things, he is a bad tribune; but if he annuls the power of the people, he is no tribune at all.[42]

So, Tiberius felt his actions were warranted because Octavius had been so greatly influenced by the aristocratic class, and he was not acting in the interest of the plebs or of the land law that would benefit them, a far cry from the intended nature of his office. Again, even if Tiberius was viewed as more "revolutionary" than "radical," he was not unjustified, and he was protecting the institution of the tribunate and the interests of the plebeian class.

An action that can be more strongly considered "revolutionary" was the way in which Tiberius went over the heads of the senators by first proposing his law to the assembly—although this tactic, too, was not without precedent. The passage of the Hortensian Law 150 years before was accomplished through the assembly rather than the Senate.[43] Boren also points out that it may not have even been politically necessary for Tiberius to do so, as he had the support of the Claudian faction of the Senate, and that the presiding consul, Mucius Scaevola, had helped draw up the first iteration of the agrarian reform bill. In any case, Tiberius went to the assembly first, a tactic that must have been interpreted as a direct threat to the superiority of the Senate—and cause for growing accusations of revolution. Again, though, we must remember that Tiberius was not acting in self-interest, but in the interest of the plebs. Furthermore, and his actions were only *interpreted* as revolutionary by the aristocracy and the Senate, those who would prove to have no sympathy for the aims of agrarian reform.

The act of revolution that, in comparison, makes Tiberius' reforms and tactics seem trivial is the violence undertaken by the Senate and their aristocratic supporters against a governmental figure. Plutarch tells us that no such measures had been taken since the end of the Kingdom of Rome at the time of the birth of the Republic, and that, "all [other matters] were amicably settled by mutual concessions, the Senate yielding for fear of the commons, and the commons out of respect for the Senate." He attributes the Senate's unwillingness for compromise to the "hatred and anger of the rich," at the

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[40] Appian, ¶ 7.
[41] Taylor, Lily Ross. "Forerunners of the Gracchi," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 52 1962. p. 19.
[42] Plutarch, Loeb Classical Library Edition, ¶ 15.2-3.
[43] Boren, 56.

prospect of land reform, evidenced by the "inhuman treatment" of Tiberius' dead body, and the trials and executions of his followers.[44]

This violence is an undeniable indicator of the crisis that the late Republic was experiencing, and it set the precedent for more (and more large-scale) political violence—both causes and effects of the end of the Republic. Appian writes that the murder of Tiberius, the first of its kind, "was never long without a new parallel thereafter."[45] This can be a reference, most obviously, to the subsequent death of Gaius Gracchus on similar grounds, after which "there remained little hope of solving Rome's problems by constitutional means."[46] However, the full-scale civil wars among Caesar, Pompey, Sulla and others came not only with political intrigues and violence, but also with violence against the state—including Caesar's famous crossing of the Rubicon. Again, the Gracchi and the civil wars of the first century BCE are related more deeply than by violence, as the agrarian reform sought to alleviate social inequalities that contributed to the rise of warlord generals and personal armies—and the wars they waged. Nevertheless, the murder of Tiberius Gracchus can be considered the "year zero" of an era that saw an increasing disregard for the constitution and ideals of the Republic.

V. Conclusion

We can be certain that social inequality in the late Republic was the cause for the proposal of an agrarian reform law, and that the inability of the aristocracy to address those inequalities was the cause of the failure of the law, and for the death of its drafters. While ten- or twenty thousand plebeians tending farms and reestablishing the "citizen soldier" class was a step in the right direction, it was not a silver bullet, and more changes would have to be made to restore the "Catonian ideal" of the early Republic, if that was the prevailing desire. The fate of one law and of two tribunes is trivial when compared to the implications of the whole scenario. Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus forced the Republic to face its problems, but the Republic appeared to have already reached a tipping point. It could be that the social values of the aristocrats may have already changed beyond the point of no return—or perhaps the growing wealth of the aristocrats revealed a selfishness that would have always taken precedence over traditional values. It could be, too, that the relocated and disgruntled soldier class was already too eager to take up arms against fellow Romans in return for the promise of a purse of gold. In any case, it turned out that "the Gracchan route was a dead-end, and at the end of it was the tyranny of the Caesars."[47]

[44] Plutarch, Bailkey and Lim, p. 34.
[45] Appian, ¶ 12.
[46] Bailkey and Lim, 342.
[47] Boren, 128.