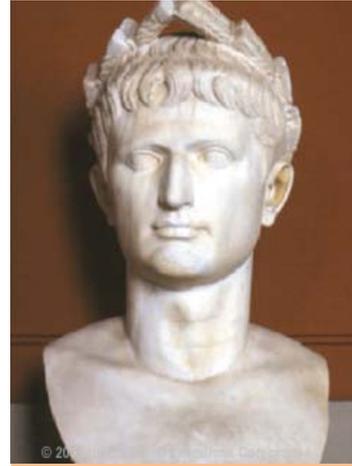


Augustus Caesar: Father of Rome

Biography

A Remarkable Rise to Power

Considered the first emperor of Rome, Augustus Caesar was a remarkable politician and leader. He came from relatively modest beginnings for the time. While his family was not among the lowest class of citizens in Roman society, they were not nobility either. However, he happened to have a great-uncle who was a general and who would forever leave his mark on Rome, Julius Caesar. The rise to power of Julius Caesar and the subsequent rule of his nephew, Augustus Caesar, would transform Rome from a republic fraught with civil wars to one of the world's most powerful empires.



Marble bust depicting Augustus Caesar.

Early Years

Augustus was born Gaius Octavius in 63 BCE. His father, also named Gaius Octavius, died when he was very young. From a young age, Gaius Octavius struggled with poor health. However, his great-uncle Julius encouraged him to be a leader. He gave his first public address at the age of 12 at his grandmother Julia's funeral. By the time he was a teenager, he was on a military expedition to Spain with Julius Caesar to fight the sons of Pompey, who was a rival Julius Caesar had recently conquered. Rome at this time was marked by civil wars. Julius Caesar was a cunning general who commanded an army of 50,000 men. He used his military might to rise higher in political ranks. However, many politicians felt that his aggressive pursuit of power threatened the republic. In other words, he had a lot of enemies.

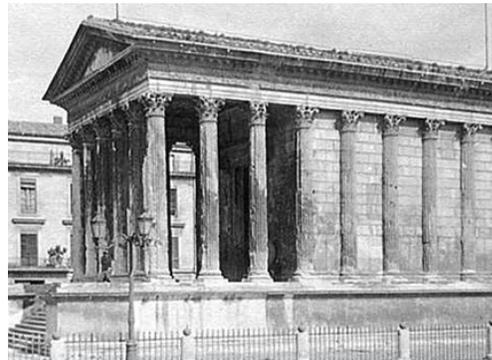
Julius Caesar was murdered by his enemies in 44 BCE, while Gaius Octavius was away from Rome completing his military training. Gaius Octavius returned to Rome to discover that his great-uncle had adopted him and named him as his heir. Julius Caesar's political and personal fortunes now belonged to him. He was only 18. He changed his name to Julius Caesar Octavianus, but went by the name of Octavian. He also called himself Caesar, which legitimized him in the eyes of many. Despite his young age, he was elected senator. Many of Julius Caesar's followers rallied around Octavian as he fought for political standing. Mark Antony, who had been a loyal assistant to Julius Caesar, wanted to control Rome, but eventually signed a pact to work together with Octavian and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. The three men then ruled Rome together for a time.

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Becoming Emperor

However, sharing leadership did not work well. Octavian gained the loyalty of the Senate and pushed out Lepidus. Antony and Octavian were soon at odds over Antony's relationship with Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. Antony had abandoned his wife Octavia, Octavian's sister, to be with Cleopatra. Their alliance was threatening for several reasons. One reason was the rumor that Cleopatra's son Caesarion was Julius Caesar's son and, according to her, his rightful heir. Octavian's forces set out to conquer Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium. Octavian won, and Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide. Octavian had Cleopatra's son Caesarion killed and annexed Egypt into the empire. One man remained standing as the ruler of Rome—Octavian.



The Maison Carrée, a Roman temple in Nîmes, France, was built during the Augustan Age.

Octavian immediately assumed the role of consul. This was the highest elected office in the land. Having already purged the Senate of anyone who had conspired against Julius Caesar, Octavian was able to secure more power without appearing to be a dictator. Even though Rome was still thought of as a republic, a government in which representatives rule on behalf of the people, Octavian gradually assumed all major leadership positions.

In 27 BCE, in a bold move, Octavian surrendered all of his powers to the Senate. They in turn awarded him the title Augustus, meaning “sacred” or “revered.” Next, he took on the role of tribune even though he did not hold the office. Tribunes were elected to look after the needs of commoners, or plebians. This position made Augustus quite popular with the lower classes because he sponsored games, rebuilt temples, and embarked on new public building projects. It was no surprise when he took on a religious role as well. He became the *pontifex maximus*, which was essentially the high priest of Rome. Just a few years later, the Senate granted him yet another title, *pater patriae* or “father of the country.”

At this point, Augustus held absolute power. He was able to achieve it by defeating enemies, building allies, and centralizing the military to keep generals from having too much power. Yet he did it all without upsetting the Senate, as Julius Caesar had done before him. In fact, the Senate willingly gave up power, perhaps without necessarily realizing it. Although Rome was still considered a republic, in reality it was an empire.

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The Augustan Legacy

Augustus ruled for 41 years, which is a long time considering that at that time the human life expectancy was shorter. Throughout his time in office, he sought to secure a male heir. He strategically had his daughter Julia married to his trusted political advisor Agrippa. Caesar adopted their two sons but neither of them outlived their grandfather. In the end, Augustus had to settle for his step-son Tiberius. Augustus died in 14 CE at the age of 76. Just a month after his death, the Senate voted to proclaim Augustus a god. Tiberius became *principate*, or the supreme ruler, and members of the same family ruled until 68 CE.

Augustus's steady rule brought peace to the Roman Empire for the first time in centuries. This 200-year period of peace, which began with Augustus's rule, is known as the *Pax Romana*, or "Roman Peace." Augustus laid the groundwork for stability. Arts and literature flourished. Some of Rome's best-known poets, including Horace, Virgil, and Ovid, wrote during this period. Many of the roads, aqueducts, and buildings that remain today were built during the Augustan Age.

Augustus is quoted as saying, "I found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble." Truly, Rome blossomed during his rule. It was the Golden Age of Rome. Whether you know it or not, we honor Augustus today with the month of August, which is named in his honor. He left a tremendous impact on Rome and the world.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** How did Gaius Octavian acquire the name Augustus?
 - A.** Julius Caesar gave him the name when he adopted him.
 - B.** The name was given to all members of the Senate.
 - C.** The Senate awarded him the title.
 - D.** He became Gaius Augustus once he was married.

- 2.** What was the result of Octavian surrendering all of his power to the Senate?
 - A.** He was then forced to leave Rome.
 - B.** The senate awarded him even more power.
 - C.** The senate gave power to his son.
 - D.** He became a senator, and the senators controlled Rome.

- 3.** What is the *Pax Romana*?
 - A.** a treaty that further expanded Rome
 - B.** the title Augustus gave himself when he assumed power
 - C.** a 200-year period of peace that began under Augustus's rule
 - D.** an epic written by the poet Ovid

- 4.** Many factors led to the rise in Augustus's power. Describe the factors, in order of importance, that contributed to Augustus's rise to power. How would his rule have been different if any of these factors did not occur? Provide details and evidence to support your answer.