The commercialization of Rome during the Republic made it difficult for officials to resist the temptations of bribery and corruption. When a politician or government official takes money from someone in return for a favor, it is called "graft." When bribery and corruption begin to run rampant, change becomes necessary. It is important to note, that corruption was not the only factor that contributed to the demise of the Roman Republic. However, one thing that is certain and that is that when corruption runs amuck, it is the common people who suffer the most.

Almost no Roman official managed to keep themselves completely clean. Cicero, whom history has held in such high esteem fell victim to temptation once or twice. Julius Caesar, himself was accused of bribing Curio in exchange for his public support of Caesar’s quest to be named consul. Almost as soon as Rome became a great power money became a corrupting force, whether it was used to sway elections, influence policy in the Senate or even dictate foreign policy.

The Second Punic War presented the wealthy men of the Republic with an enormous opportunity to further their grip on power and prestige in Rome. During the war the government fell into deep financial ruin. To alleviate this situation, wealth Roman citizens came forward and gave large loans to the government in order to replenish the money supply. In turn, the leaders of the Republic promise to pay back the money (with interest) once the conflict finally came to an end. This would happen after Rome finally defeated and sacked Carthage. From this point forward, the Roman treasury never lacked money. It would not be long before money would begin to corrupt.

The first case of a Roman official taking bribes occurred in 171 B.C. when a senator was exposed for taking handouts from a foreign diplomat in exchange for political favors. Unfortunately for the senator and diplomat, neither had enough money to pay off all of those who came to know about the agreement and the news went public. Unfortunately, after this event, bribery became the norm in the Republic's foreign relations. Eventually the corruption extended itself into domestic policy as well. Aristocrats, who sought power and prestige, began to purchase their way into political office or military appointments.

It wouldn’t be long before it become custom for roman political candidates to walk around the Forum pampering rich farmer’s requests, in an effort to secure their votes. Eventually a law was passed that banned political candidates from wearing eye-catching white garments so that they would not stand out from the crowds and gather attention from potential bribers. Candidates were also forbidden to wander around on market days when more people when the greatest number of people would have easy access to them. In 181 B.C. a new law was passed, which declared that any candidate who was caught campaigning illegally would be ineligible to run for any political position for ten years. Unfortunately, many of these laws were disobeyed more frequently than they were observed.

Finally in the last two decades of the Republic the exchange of political favors for votes reached critical levels. A law was finally passed that created punishments for both the briber and the government official. Any official caught taking a bribe or any person caught paying a bribe would be sentenced to ten years in exile. Candidates for office were also barred from hosting any public sports games for the public for a period of 2 years before they ran for office. Unfortunately for the Republic, action came far too late. By now, political corruption had become the norm and fair elections rarely occurred. Candidates and their advisors even began to group supported into small factions and use these factions to spread popularity and influence. Soon it began possible for any wealthy roman with deep pockets to rise easily through the roman political ranks, as long as he was able and willing to spend lavishly for votes. Once in office, these nobles would rule at the expense of the common man. Their only ambition was to acquire more and more power and prestige. To do so required them to cater solely to the whims of the most influential members of roman society.