Senatus Consultum Ultimum and the Gracchi

INSTRUCTIONS: Read through the following, and answer Q 1 – 3 in your book.

USE AGAINST GAIUS GRACCHUS

As Gaius Gracchus' reforms escalated political tensions, the Senate, dominated by the conservative Optimates, felt threatened by the growing influence of the Populares faction. In response to the perceived threat posed by Gaius, the Senate issued senatus consultum ultimum. This declaration essentially authorized the use of force to suppress what the Senate considered a dangerous and unconstitutional movement.

1. Describe how the Senate used the SCU against Gaius.

LEGAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Senatus consultum ultimum suspended normal legal protections and constitutional safeguards. It allowed the consuls to take extreme measures, including the use of force, to preserve the Roman Republic in times of perceived internal strife. In the case of Gaius Gracchus, this declaration marked a turning point in Roman politics, as it legitimized the use of violence against a Roman citizen for the sake of maintaining the established order.

1. Identify the legal and political implications of the SCU.

CONSEQUENCES

Following the declaration of senatus consultum ultimum, violence erupted in Rome. Gaius Gracchus, facing an increasingly hostile political climate, attempted to escape capture. However, he and many of his supporters were cornered, leading to Gaius' tragic end. This event marked a significant moment in Roman history, highlighting the tensions between competing political factions and the potential for the Senate to use extreme measures to maintain control.

1. Explain TWO (2) consequences of the SCU

Comparison of the approaches of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus in implementing reforms

INSTRUCTIONS: Using the table on the following page, identify the similarities (comparison) and differences (contrast) between the Gracchi brothers.

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|  | Tiberius | Gaius |
| Objectives | Land Reform Focus: Tiberius Gracchus' primary objective was to address the economic disparity resulting from the concentration of land in the hands of a few wealthy individuals. His proposed lex agraria aimed to redistribute public land to the landless poor, ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources | Broad Socio-Political Reforms: Gaius Gracchus expanded the scope of reforms beyond land distribution. While he continued his brother's land reform initiatives, Gaius also introduced measures such as the extension of Roman citizenship to some Italian allies and the establishment of colonies for landless citizens. His objectives were broader and aimed at addressing social, economic, and political challenges. |
| Methods | Utilisation of the Tribunate: Tiberius employed his position as a tribune of the plebs to propose and champion his reforms. He used the power of veto and the tribunate's authority to bring attention to the issues faced by the landless poor. | Expanding the Role of the Tribunate: Gaius also utilized the tribunate extensively, but he went further by empowering it with additional legislative authority. This allowed him to propose and pass laws without Senate approval, further challenging the traditional power dynamics. |
| Reactions from the Senate | Resistance and Opposition: Tiberius faced staunch opposition from the Senate, which viewed his land reforms as a threat to the established aristocratic order. The Senate used its influence to block Tiberius' initiatives, leading to a political standoff. | Escalation of Conflict: Gaius encountered even more intense opposition. His proposed reforms, including citizenship extension and increased political powers for the tribunate, were seen as radical challenges to the Senate's authority. The Senate, dominated by the Optimates, escalated its resistance, leading to increased political tension. |
| Populares faction alignment | Both brothers aligned themselves with the Populares faction, a political group that championed the rights and interests of the common people against the conservative Optimates. This alignment reflected a shared commitment to populist ideals. | |
| Use of popular support | Tiberius and Gaius recognized the importance of popular support. They both sought to garner favor among the urban and rural poor, appealing to the masses through their proposed reforms. Public speeches, rallies, and direct engagement with the people were common strategies. | |
| Tragic End | Both Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus met tragic ends. Tiberius was killed in a violent confrontation with senators and their supporters during his attempt at re-election in 133 BCE. Gaius, facing heightened opposition, eventually took his own life in 121 BCE after a failed attempt to escape capture. | |