Notes on Quiz #5: Optimates and Populares

1. All of the following are true of Tiberius Gracchus's land-reform bill EXCEPT:
   a. It was designed to break up large estates made up of public land and divide them among landless Roman citizens
   b. Tiberius's failure to consult the senate before presenting the bill to the assembly was unprecedented and illegal
   c. The pontifex maximus, Scipio Nasica, led an angry mob of senators to club Tiberius and his supporters to death
   d. The land commission to break up the estates was set up anyway despite Tiberius's death

The Gracchan laws affected the Italian public lands (ager publicus)—vast amounts of lands taken by Rome in war. These lands had been settled by citizens in small freeholds still technically owned by the state but farmed by generations of Roman citizen farmers. But the shifting of the rural economy in the third and second centuries meant that more and more of this land was ending up as part of the large estates of the rich. Tiberius Gracchus's law proposed enforcing an old law saying no one could have more than 300 acres; he hoped to redistribute the land to recreate a large population of citizen farmers out of the landless poor teeming in Rome. This was taken by the rich as a rabble-rousing attack on behalf of the poor. — Gracchus also bypassed the senate and proposed his law directly to the people. Over time it had become customary to present laws first to the senate, which would debate them and offer a resolution supporting it if they approved. Since the conservative senate contained many rich landholders and their friends, and were moreover averse to radical change that would upset customs and traditions of the Republic (which they felt duty-bound to protect), Gracchus knew his law would be opposed by the senate. But bypassing the senate angered the elite, and since Gracchus broke no laws in doing so the response to Gracchus was personal and outside of the system. — Gracchus also had the Assembly vote to remove a tribune who had threatened to veto the bill if it passed, and funded the land commission created by the law by diverting the bequest of the king of Pergamum, scorning the senate's traditional control over foreign policy. In bypassing the senate, acting against a (pro-senate) tribune, and diverting the Pergamene bequest, Gracchus asserted a more extreme idea of the power of the People (without reference to the state) than most in the ruling class could withstand.

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2. The Social War (90–88 BCE) refers to the armed conflict between
   a. Facebook and MySpace
   b. the optimates and the populares
   c. the patricians and the plebeians
   d. the Italian allies and Rome

After the assassination of Drusus, the Italians gave up on a political solution for their demand to be made full citizens of Rome, and seceded, creating a new confederate state called Italia. Since the Italians were well trained Roman soldiers, they knew all the Romans' tactics and defeated them crushingly on several occasions. Ultimately, the Romans won by offering amnesty and full citizenship to those Italian peoples who laid down their arms; those who did not were brutally suppressed. The result was most of Italy gaining Roman citizenship.

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3. Gaius Marius's impact on Roman history includes all of the following EXCEPT:
   a. swiftly defeating Jugurtha after a long war conducted by his optimate enemy, Metellus
   b. reforming the army to defeat the Cimbri and Teutones after a disastrous Roman defeat under optimate generals
   c. marrying Julius Caesar's aunt
   d. winning his seventh consulship during a period of peace and good will between the factions

Marius, a "new man" who married into the presigious Julius Caesar clan (and thus becoming the future dictator's uncle), rose to popularity after bringing a swift end to the Jugurthine War, which had dragged on under optimate leadership. He was then called on to save Rome from the Cimbri and Teutiones. The main issue with recruiting

soldiers to fight Rome's wars in the Middle Republic was that there was a minimum property requirement. In order to create an army large enough to fend off the massive Cimbri/Teutones invasion, Marius did away with this requirement, creating what is known as the "volunteer army" or the "proletarian army." With these forces, Marius was able to defeat the invaders, and this became the model for all Roman armies going forward. — The problem with the volunteer army is that with no wealth and no homestead of their own to return to, these soldiers were dependent on their general to ensure they had land to return on and a share in the spoils of war. This helped ensure that Roman legions were loyal to their generals rather than to the central government that protected the homesteads of the landed families, making possible the general's march on Rome that brought Sulla, Caesar, and later many emperors to power. — Eventually, he won his seventh consulship by violently seizing Rome while Sulla was away in the east, performing a purge of his enemies and having their heads mounted on spikes in the forum for all to see.

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4. Mithridates's prearranged massacre of thousands of Italians in Asia Minor sparked a chain of events that led to the consul Sulla doing all of the following EXCEPT:
    a. being given the commission to wage war against Mithridates
    b. marching his army on Rome to restore order after riots in favor of replacing him with Marius
    c. staying in Rome to protect the government and not marching east to fight Mithridates
    d. having himself declared dictator to reconstitute the state after the Marian disruption

Mithridates's massacre of Romans and Italians in Asia province forced Rome to go to war actively against him, after years of little action against Mithridates's casual expansionism in Anatolia. This led to a Roman effort to take direct control in a region Rome had been leaving partly to itself, which was part of what moved Rome toward taking a greater and more assertive role in controlling the east. — At home, the need for war against Mithridates was seized as an opportunity by the supporters of Marius, who got the command against Mithridates taken away from the pro-senate consul, Sulla. In the riot that followed, Sulla restored order by marching on Rome with his army, establishing a terrible precedent of generals using the army against the Roman state. He then went to the east to fight Mithridates, eventually returning after Marius seized power to fight a Marian army before the gates of Rome.

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5. The ultimate decree of the senate (*senatus consultum ultimum*) called on
    a. the gods to punish Roman nobles who rose against their own city
    b. the consuls to take any necessary action to preserve the state
    c. posterity to witness the justice of the senate's actions
    d. architects to design comfier benches for senators to sit on

The senatus consultum ultimum, or "ultimate decree," was a Senate vote to instruct the consul and other top magistrates to defend the Republic and see that no harm came to the state. It enabled the state to use violence against Roman citizens, depriving them of provocatio (a citizen's right of appeal to the People) and other protections. — It could be wielded by a faction in the Senate (in this case, the most conservative of the "optimates"). It was used to justify killing C. Gracchus and thousands of his supporters, and was later invoked against other populist leaders (including Julius Caesar).

Optional Extra Credit

EC. In your opinion, what did the *populares* stand for?

There are a number of possible answers here; one of the key elements is opposition to the systems and institutions of the Republic that kept the same people and policies in place despite the drastic changes in Rome's circumstances.