

## Caesar: Hero or tyrant?

Julius Caesar lived from around 100 BCE to 44 BCE, when he was assassinated by the Roman senate. During Caesar's time as *Dictator perpetuus*, he changed Rome in more ways than any ruler before him. Caesar did many things during his lifetime, and it is often debated if he was a Hero, someone who makes changes with the good of the people in mind, or a Tyrant, someone who makes changes to help themselves. I think that the way Caesar changed and ruled Rome affected the country in a positive way, but the way that he obtained enough power to make changes was Tyrannical.

Caesar did many things, like helping the poor, that may make him seem like a hero. He was very popular amongst the people, as this quote from page 7 of the document packet shows: "The people loved him. They wanted to see Julius Caesar in a strong position of power so that he could solve these problems." This quote is from the section of our packet discussing the problems that Rome faced, and how Caesar tried to solve them. The quote clearly shows how some, if not most, wanted Caesar to have power. The people didn't think that Caesar was a bad leader, and that he really could solve their problems. I do agree with others that Caesar helped Rome, in fact, without him, Rome never would have risen to as large as it was at its peak. The fact remains that many of the things he did had some political motivation to help himself, even if he did help the people in the process.

For one thing, Caesar often put up a false front to help himself gain popularity and power, which is most definitely not heroic. A quote that gives a specific example comes from document packet page 11, document 6. "The crowd wildly endorsed Caesar's actions, and it was quite obvious that they weren't yet ready for a king. The event, likely staged..." This quote was at the end of a description of an event where a civilian tried to give Caesar a crown, and Caesar refused, possibly because of the crowd's negative reaction. It is my opinion that a hero should never stage anything, even if they think it would be better for the people. Caesar probably did this to find out if the people wanted him to be king. For Caesar, it was a win-win situation. If the people did want him to be king, Caesar would accept, gaining more power. If they didn't, he would refuse, gaining popularity and thereby power.

Caesar also took over Rome and the Roman government by force, which is one of the trademarks of a tyrant. In document one in the first page of our document packet, the event is described by an internet site on Julius Caesar. "In 49 BCE Caesar crossed the Rubicon river, the demarcation line between his province and Italy. He marched on Rome at the head of his battle-hardened army, where he met little resistance." Part of the definition of a tyrant is someone who forces their leadership upon the people. Even though many people in Rome wanted Caesar as their leader, a true hero would have waited until they could rise to power without using military force. When Caesar took over, he angered the senate, which led to his eventual assassination. I think that if the situation had been different and the people hadn't wanted Caesar as a leader, he would have done the same thing, which I feel is proof that he wasn't a total hero.

In addition to the way he took power and his publicity stunts, Caesar also ignored the opinions of others, especially those of the senate. In document 4, packet page 8, it says "Caesar's solution was to

reconstitute himself as a Roman for of Hellenistic divine king or ruler.” The document continues to say how the Romans were proud of the fact that they gained what little freedom they had from the riddance of their old kings, nearly 500 years before. Despite this, Caesar still did his best to become king. This is clear evidence that he ignored, or at least didn’t value others opinions. Again, because the people wanted Caesar to have power, the fact that he was breaking five hundred years of Roman tradition was overlooked by most, but the senate remembered it, and this among other things was why Caesar was assassinated.

Caesar did more and more things like these three examples, becoming more and more popular with the powerless people, and more and more feared by the powerful Senate. The end result was a man that had so much power over both that the more dismayed of the two parties killed him. This is the single most powerful piece of evidence that Caesar seemed to be affecting Rome in a positive way, but behind the scenes, he was only trying to gain more power for himself, and he conveniently ended up helping his country along the road to ultimate power.

*“Our tyrant deserved to die. Here was a man who wanted to be king of the Roman people and master of the whole world. Those who agree with an ambition like this must also accept the destruction of existing laws and freedoms. It is not right or fair to want to be a king in a state that used to be free and ought to be free today”* Cicero, a Roman philosopher