

# Thirsting for power



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Power is defined the ability to do something or act in a particular way, especially as a faculty or quality. Each and every person possesses some type of power over another thing. Some people are content with not having any power whatsoever and then there are people whose entire lives revolve around that thirst and need for power. The latter is a description of two famous people in history, Malcolm X and Julius Caesar. Thirsting for power and wanting to much of a good thing can be very self-destructive. This thirst for power can cause people to be blinded but the reality of what is going on around them.

Taking into consideration that both of these powerful leaders had this longing for power that ultimately led to their destruction we can identify many similarities and differences that may be relevant to their nature and the way they both lived, and died. The major difference between Julius Caesar and Malcolm X is obviously the time period in which they were from. Malcolm X was born in the early 20's and Julius Caesar was born around 100 BC. These time periods are completely different eras from each other yet the thirst for power and a solid following was present in both of them.

The thirst for power is something that has been around since man was created. A key similarity between these two leaders is that their thirst for power and their ability to have an influential effect on people's lives was seen from a very early age. Caesar was born around 100 BC and by the time he was 18 had already been through and witnessed more than many people had that were in their later years of age. He was married to the daughter of a very noble man, fathered her child. Then was ordered to divorce her or be

executed. Caesar refused to divorce Cornelia and her father ordered him to be executed which caused him to go into hiding.

After escaping that event, barely with his life he was kidnapped in Greece. Around 60BC is when his power really started to motivate his daily actions as well as increase the crazy thirst he had for power. " While sailing to Greece for further study, Caesar was kidnapped by Cilician pirates and held for ransom. When informed that they intended to ask for 20 talents, he is supposed to have insisted that he was worth at least 50. He maintained a friendly, joking relationship with the pirates while the money was being raised, but warned them that he would track them down and have them crucified after he was released.

He did just that, with the help of volunteers, as a warning to other pirates, but he first cut their throats to lessen their suffering because they had treated him well," (Yavetz). The experience of Caesar's kidnapping helps us to see another similarity between him and Malcolm X. Both men were considered very wise, intellectual and eloquent speakers. This worked very much in their advantage. They were quick to think on their feet and were able to persuade and convince people very easily. This is a very useful skill regarding the thirst of power because in order to have power a person must also have support and some sort of following.

This is needed in order for the power to grow and to help to protect the leader from enemies who are not so supportive or easily convinced. The fact that Caesar could be held captive by pirates, entertain and joke with them while warning them of their deaths that will come as revenge, shows so much about Caesar's attitude. In 72 BC Caesar was elected military tribune

and then would go on to speak to the people at the funerals of his loved ones. Instead of putting much of the focus on those who died, those who were close to him, he made sure that the people that were listening acknowledged his noble past and bloodline (Kebrick).

It was during this time that the thirst for power began to really be set in motion. It was at this time that he was beginning to gain more and more of a following and put into the peoples' heads how magnificent of a leader he would be. " In 58 BC Caesar left Rome for Gaul; he would not return for 9 years, in the course of which he would conquer most of what is now central Europe, opening up these lands to Mediterranean civilization—a decisive act in world history. However, much of the conquest was an act of aggression prompted by personal ambition (not unlike the conquests of Alexander the Great).

Fighting in the summers, he would return to Cisalpine Gaul (northern Italy) in the winters and manipulate Roman politics through his supporters," (Kebric). After this and many more complex events and elections Caesar would continue to plunder neighboring territories and occupy them. This is how the rise of the Roman Empire, the strongest and longest lasting empire began. Caesar would publicly deny his want to be idolized as a King but acted in ways that suggested he wanted to be idolized more of a God than a Monarch. It was this attitude and his thirst for more power, more territory that would lead his enemies to assassinate him in 44 BC.

" Caesar attended the last meeting of the Senate before his departure, held at its temporary quarters in the portico of the theater built by Pompey the Great (the Curia, located in the Forum and the regular meeting house of the

Senate, had been badly burned and was being rebuilt). The sixty conspirators, led by Marcus Junius Brutus, Gaius Cassius Longinus, Decimus Brutus Albinus, and Gaius Trebonius, came to the meeting with daggers concealed in their togas and struck Caesar at least 23 times as he stood at the base of Pompey's statue," (Yavetz).

Although his own reign was short lived and his thirst for power caused his own self destruction, Julius Caesar will always be known for the creation and rise of the Roman Empire. Malcolm X, like Julius Caesar, had a troubled childhood. His parents died young and he was in and out of foster homes as well as jail cells. When the law finally caught up with him in Boston, for a robbery charge, he was sentenced to a 8-10 year sentence in Charleston Prison. It was in prison in which his thirst for power began to take shape.

He was introduced to many books and would often read many in one day. Also while in prison, he was visited by several siblings who had joined to the Nation of Islam, a small sect of black Muslims who embraced the ideology of black nationalism—the idea that in order to secure freedom, justice and equality, black Americans needed to establish their own state entirely separate from white Americans. Malcolm X converted to the Nation of Islam while in prison," (Malcolm X). Malcolm's transition and thirst for power was a lot different from Caesars for the reason that he had good intentions.

He wanted better for his people, African American people. He had seen so much racism and lost many close friends and even his family to the KKK. Teachers told him from a young age that because he was African American, he wouldn't be able to do things such as become a lawyer and that he

needed to be more realistic about his place in life. It was these numbered events that offered fuel to the fire that was burning inside Malcolm. He was unhappy with the way society was working, along with the majority of society at this time.

In my opinion, Malcolm was a much better leader than Caesar because the motives behind his thirst for power had some justification, at least for African Americans and was not just about taking over any and everything that he could, like with Caesar. Malcolm's thirst for power was to offer something better to his people whereas Caesar's thirst for power came from arrogance and wanting the world to recognize him as being the most powerful. When X was released in 1952 he would relocate to Detroit, Michigan and join forces with the head of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Mohammed to spread the word of this new way of life.

In the eyes of the Nation of Islam, he was a miraculous leader. He became overseeing minister of a temple in Harlem, a temple in Boston and even helped to found temples in Philadelphia and Hartford. Articulate, passionate and a naturally gifted and inspirational orator, Malcolm X exhorted blacks to cast off the shackles of racism " by any means necessary," including violence. " You don't have a peaceful revolution," he said. " You don't have a turn-the-cheek revolution. There's no such thing as a nonviolent revolution."

Such militant proposals—a violent revolution to establish an independent black nation—won Malcolm X large numbers of followers as well as many fierce critics," (Malcolm X). It was Malcolm's ability to captivate audiences, just as Caesar, that would put him front-and-center of a power vacuum. Also, like Caesar, he would be betrayed and envied by those who were close to

him. In Malcolm's case it was Eliza Mohammed who would begin to envy X's power and ability to gain support. X would leave the Nation of Islam in 1964 after constant tension with Elijah and his disgust with disregarding his own teachings.

He considered Elijah to be a hypocrite and felt that the path the Nation was going down was one doomed for disaster. Little did he know, this move would be the lead to his own disaster. On the evening of February 21, 1965, at the Audubon Ballroom in Manhattan, where Malcolm X was about to deliver a speech, three gunmen rushed the stage and shot him 15 times at point blank range... He was 39 years old. The three men convicted of the assassination of Malcolm X were all members of the Nation of Islam. Although both Caesar and X were both powerful speakers and leaders, their motives behind power were quite different.

Both men wanted to convince as many people as they could that the way things were being done, were not right. Both men felt they had the power to change the world. However, the differences lie in how they wanted it to change. Caesar wanted violently take over all and any territory he could and X wanted to gain the support of his people and ultimately begin a quest back to Africa where African Americans could live amongst themselves without discrimination. The actions that resulted from their thirst for power is what would ultimately lead to both of their assassinations.