

"the assassination of  
julius caesar" by  
michael parenti essay  
sample



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## **“ The Assassination of Julius Caesar” by Michael Parenti Essay Sample**

“ The Assassination of Julius Caesar” by Michael Parenti goes into details about the events that lead up to the death of Caesar due to class conflicts. In 44 BC, the assassination of Julius Caesar was lead by conspiring members of the Roman senate who wanted to remove the dictator, who was increasingly acquiring power, and to revive the Republic government. Parenti’s book protests against the gentlemen historians and the class society that they used to describe the assassination of Julius Caesar. His book also gives us insight about the Late Republic and takes us through the events that were presented in the actions of people and politicians in the death of Caesar. In Parenti’s novel, he outlines the events of why people would want to assassinate Caesar, not who. Everything that contributes to the death of Caesar open doors to more than what meets the eyes. The Assassination of Julius Caesar offers a new perspective on ancient era that contain interesting information, which can relate to our own times. Back then in Rome, society was divided into different classes. On the bottom of the social structures were the slaves, who made one third of the entire population. Slaves were the ones that had to work in the mines or plantation. Next were the freed Romans, who were known as the proletarians.

They were either descendent of slaves or were ex-slave, who lived in the impoverished areas of Italy. Proletarians had to live in crowded tenements that were full of disease, or in a tall buildings that tended to collapse or easily catch fire. On top of the proletarians were the farmers or small landowners and above them, were the middle class, such as the merchants.

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After the middle class, were the wealthy, also known as equestrians. They were banker, tax collectors, and landowners. At the top of the social summit, were the aristocrats, who populated the Roman Senate. They were the wealthiest of the wealthy and owners of large estates, vast *lati-fundias*, which were worked by the slaves. The aristocrats did very little to no work on their lands, letting the slaves do all the grunt work. Small farm holders used to own land outside of Rome, until the elite dragged them out to take over that land and made slaves work on it around 199 BC. This is an example of what is occurring on today in the United States, that wealth is creating poverty. When a majority of wealth is concentrated at the top of class pyramid, it creates a power vacuum that allows the rich minority to impose its will on the other classes.

In the beginning of the novel, Parenti's makes an argument that the majority of the Roman historians from the later period, whose work is still circling around, believe that they are patrician bias. He mentions that history is bias because only the rich had any spare time in their hand to become involved in researches and writings. A majority of ancient writings has been lost, and only a very few that have survived were those from the wealthy perspective. Parenti included in his book that later writers such as Gibbon, were equivalent in their own societies to Roman patricians, being of the upper or educated and aristocratic classes. Parenti refers to these writers as "Gentlemen Historians". Gentlemen Historians were defined by Parenti as writers of history, whose viewpoints were from that of the elite classes. For example, in his novel, Parenti stated that "Gibbon was not, 'an eighteenth-century Englishman,' but an eighteenth century English gentleman'" (Parenti

15). Parenti made sure to distinguish the difference between a regular Englishman and an English gentleman because the term gentleman meant you were part of the upper class, whereas the term Englishmen would refer to the hardworking members of the middle and lower classes.

The term gentleman doesn't necessary mean they are really " gentlemen". For them, the term gentleman was those who " sported an uncommonly polished manner and affluent lifestyle, and who presented himself as prosperous politically conservative, and properly schooled in the art of ethno-class supremacism" (Parenti 14). Overall, Parenti believe that ancient and modern historian writers are biased due to their social status as gentleman historian, who are wealthy landowning republican aristocracy, and who criticize " post- Gracchian reformers as ' demagogues' (Parenti 77) and the ' common people of Rome from as ... ' rabble' " (Parenti 3). Parenti believes that historian writers in the upper, educated, aristocratic class are the reasons why many pieces of literature portray Caesar as a power mad demagogue or as a person who never wanted power Historian either view the death of Caesar as justified, because he was a dictator and it would benefit the people of Rome, or unjustified, because conspirators were trying to retain power These perspectives are from modern historians not Romans After all, the elite were the ones that had the time to write histories with their resources and connections they had.

Parenti combines Karl Marx in with the historians he criticized, describing " the dispossessed peasants of Late Republic who crowded into Rome as a ' mob of do-nothings'" (Parenti 208). Marx is comparing the difference between the working class of Rome and the modern day working class. This <https://assignbuster.com/the-assassination-of-julius-caesar-by-michael-parenti-essay-sample/>

is an example of how Parenti examined the death of Caesar in term of social and people history. Parenti's people history focus on Caesar and the urban masses because these histories were always written from the perspective of the elite class. Since the elite had so much power in their hands, they were always the one in control. History was written from the elite perspective because they had the money and the time to do. For example, all political decisions were made by the Senate and the Senate was made up of the rich, wealthy, aristocrats. The Senate were the one who determined farm policy, appointed governors, controlled the republic and the deployment of army, appointed military commander, and so much more. Some people wondered how the Senate got elected. The answer is that they were self elected and self appointed because they had the power to do so. Many people who were part of the assembly were wealthy too because many voting units went to the rich, while the proletarian only had a couple votes.

The wealthy did not carry any financial burdens because they didn't have to pay taxes. In fact, their wealth increased through the government. The rich would lend money to the state, and when the state paid back, it was with interest. Just like in today's generations, definite spending and regressive taxes result in the same redistribution of income. Elections in the past are very similar to elections in the modern world. Parenti even stated that "Elections were contested by candidates who were either wealthy themselves or were bankrolled by wealthy backers" (Parenti 52). Of course, in order to win these elections, candidates often used bribery. He continues by stating that in order for one to increase their chances of winning is by emphasizing "his personal integrity and leadership, the prestige of his family name, his

association with important personalities of the day, his public service, and his heroic war record" (Parenti 52), which we can relate to today's electoral candidates According to Parenti, about ninety percent of today's modern day historians are Cicero supporter. In some people's point of view, Cicero was a great champion of republican liberty. A year after Caesar's murder in 44 BC, Cicero, who was not part of the assassination, but was for it, wrote to Brutus and other associates.

" I do not admit your doctrine of mercy. There should be a salutary severity, for if we are going to be merciful, civil wars will never cease" (183). In 63 BC, Cicero created a campaign against reformers in the Senate, though it was more akin to a witch hunt. He executed five people that were charged with conspiracy against the State without trial. This brutal display was known as the Conspiracy of Catiline. " Velleius Paterculus, Plutarch, Juvenal, Lucan, Dio Cassius, Florus, and other ancient writers praise him almost as much as he praised himself for having thwart a pestiferous against Rome and its upstanding citizens" said Parenti, but on the other hand, " modern-day historians accept Cicero's account of how he rescued the city from Catiline's clutches" (Parenti 107). Even though Caesar was portrayed as a tyrant, he did many thing to help the poor. Instead of helping the rich get richer, he tried to make the rich pay something for the state.

Cicero believe that Caesar would show no mercy in killing off the nobility, so therefore, they plotted against him. Caesar stated that he " been sated with power and glory; but should anything happen to me, Rome will enjoy no peace" (Parenti 161). Caesar was trying to avoid civil war and also trying to strengthen democratic forces by enfranchising the population on the part of <https://assignbuster.com/the-assassination-of-julius-caesar-by-michael-parenti-essay-sample/>

land he had conquered. Also, Caesar tried to bypass the Senate and focus more on the assembly, which showed that he was moving toward a democratic direction. Because of this, it caused many historians, from Cicero till this day, to see his ortacorcy. The Senate wasn't mad because of the fact that Caesar had power, but how he used that power. Instead of helping the rich, he was trying to help the poor.

He tried to deal with poverty, debt relief, aristocratic greed, etc. which did no benefit anyone from the upper classes. The aristocrats are supposed to protect the constitution, which was an unwritten , because the constitution was made up of their law and it only benefit the elite's class interest. Until this day, aristocratic freedom still was pursued by the upper classes In the end, Cicero, Brutus, and Cato are supposedly remembered as the defenders of liberty, whereas Caesar, who did something for the poor and moved against the privilege property, is known as a dictator. History was viewed through the perspective of the elite classes, but The Assassination of Julius Caesar showed readers different. Parenti outlined the social and political context of the death of Caesar. His book offers background, dating back to the period where Julius Caesar was in power, about the struggle for economic democracy, the abuse of slave, the corruption, and many more. It's fascinating how history in the past can be similar to the modern world.

#### Work Cited

Parenti, Michael. The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People's History of Ancient Rome. New York: New, 2003. Print.