

Causes of julius caesar's assassination



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'Ad Hoc'; Why Caesar Was Assassinated

One cannot understand the assassination of Julius Caesar without first looking at human nature. Throughout history, the idea of fighting for an ideology believed to be one for, “the good of the people” has been for long the explanation given for various violent actions and revolutions. The assassination of Caesar is often projected as the conspirators fighting against perceived Tyranny for the good of the people or, for some a chance to enact upon their individual vendettas.[1] This reasoning although somewhat true, is a basic generalization of what the conspirators were really striving for when the assassination became reality. The assassination of Caesar is not necessarily a consequence of settling personal vendettas from the past nor is it done for “the good of the people” of Rome. Rather, in this paper I argue that the assassination of Caesar is a consequence of the conspirators fighting for the survival of their own nobility and self-interests.

Firstly, the conspirators gossiped about the possibility of kingship for some time as men like Brutus, Decimus and Cassius concluded that they would become the individual champions and leaders of Rome if they were to remove the ever-growing threat to them, “The Tyrant-King”, Caesar.

[2] Therefore, they would wield the power they loathed for which Caesar blocked them from obtaining. Furthermore, many Senators and Aristocrats felt their own power diminished thus, humiliating them.[3] Consequently, the conspiracy forms not for the good of Rome but so the Senators may protect their own dignity in light of how much they lost from owing Caesar so much. Evidently, the actions of some to place crowns, and the term, “King” on Caesar became consistent enough that Caesar became perpetually

associated with possibility of tyranny and kingship. These ‘scandals’ of association to kingship develop the idea that the once noble senators now have a massive road block in the way of obtaining their own power as their influence begins to deteriorate.[4]

Ultimately, Caesar’s growing support amongst the people and the incredible power he possessed convinced many conspirators, whether true or not, that Caesar had the urge and potential to become “King”. This threatened the very livelihood and nobility of each man’s privileged interests in the Senate.

[5]Due to Caesar’s exponentially growing influence on the Republic, the actions taken by the conspirators is inevitable because each Senator is too proud and unwilling to allow their own influence and nobility to slowly deteriorate. Thus, the personal, political and ideological factors mould together to form the selfish motive and excuse for each conspirator’s actions.

What personal motives lead to removing the new “King” Caesar?

Kingship rumours proceeded to pour into the Senate days before the assassination.[6]Two individuals in particular sought to break the strains placed on their influence by removing the threat to their future, Caesar, to protect their own nobility from the possibility of an all-powerful King as personal factors played their part. Marcus Brutus and Cassius, the two most important conspirators, conspired a plan to return the power back to themselves.[7]Caesar’s growing power certainly threatened Brutus’ and Cassius’ power as the senate had lost some of its nobility. A motive inferred by Appian suggests these men believed the assassination would be seen as

a necessary good by the people therefore, they would be seen as, “ leaders”. [8]This motive, along with growing discontent amongst the Senators, provided the perfect formula for Brutus and Cassius. They would Kill Caesar, be perceived as Leaders by both peers and the people thus, they now inhibit their own growing support to become powerful once more. Whether the validity of these beliefs from the men are true or not, the possibility of advancing their own nobility or status from removing the man who reduced the influence of their peers would surely be a gamble worth taking.

From Yavetz, there is an inference that the majority of Senators would have reached a common understanding with Caesar if he simply treated them better and not made them scapegoats to the people.[9]This argument is flawed however, as each individual Senator comes from a noble, proud background. Thus, how one is treated by Caesar is irrelevant so long as the respect for their position and influence one holds in the Senate remains intact. Furthermore, this lack of respect is seen throughout Brutus’ letter to Cicero. The letter exhibits the fact that Brutus believed the only possible thing that could have been done to liberate himself from supposed slavery of the Tyrant Caesar was in fact killing Caesar.[10]This means that conspirators such as Brutus and Cassius felt perpetually stuck under the all-powerful Caesar who did not respect their Roman republican tradition, causing them to create the conspiracy.

Evidently, this further proves the importance of the personal factors of the conspiracy as Brutus and Cassius needed Caesar gone not for the good of the people, but more importantly for the good of their positions and nobility within the Roman Empire. Consequently, Decimus, the dear friend and ally of <https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-julius-caesars-assassination/>

Caesar, suddenly turns on him and joins the plot.[11]What caused this is the excessive ambition seen from conspirators. Decimus's letters indicate his desire for an honour to showcase his triumphs in Rome, but Caesar rejected this while allowing lesser generals to receive a similar distinction.[12]The blow this must have dealt to a noble man such as Decimus, a man surely full of pride from his great victories, would have been enough for Decimus to take swift action.

Ultimately, Decimus, Brutus and Cassius began to play key roles in the formulation of Caesar's downfall. Together, bound by the desire to rectify their own possible status, they killed Caesar so that they may prosper over Caesar's steadily growing power that posed the threat of possible Kingship. Therefore, it is clearly demonstrated that each of these leading conspirators assassinated Caesar to put the power back into their own hands.

Why did humiliation lead to the conspiracy?

Another growing concern for the noble men in the Senate stems from the humility some men faced from fighting for Pompey over Caesar.[13]A recurring theme for the motives in the assassination is that many men needed Caesar gone for their own personal good. Caesar followed a process of, "Clementia" to allow those who fought against him in the civil war to receive benefits and keep their positions. This process upset both former enemies and those who fought alongside Caesar as pointed out in, 'Epstein'. [14]On one side, those that are forgiven now feel humiliation from the perpetual feeling of owing everything to Caesar due to his forgiveness. On the other side, the men who fought alongside him feel duped as they chose

the winning side yet are not afforded anymore privileges that are not offered to those who opposed Caesar.[15]

Various senators reasonably disliked having to feel like mere subjects of a man they once opposed and lost to, so they joined the conspiracy to lift the psychological burden of their own conscience. The others despised Caesar for allowing these former enemies to have any similar kind of authority to them. These opposing reasons for despising Caesar intersect at a specific angle. Either side of the fence in this situation demonstrates the motive for wanting Caesar dead deriving from the personal interests of the Senators. In order to regain one's nobility or perceived benefits, each individual now had a personal and political reason for joining the conspiracy. It is possible to say that a select few of the conspirators plotted the assassination not to end their perpetual feeling of humiliation but rather, to avenge their loss in the civil war.[16] However, I find it difficult to concur with this motion as these men became treasonous only after some time had passed.[17]

If the act of murder became apparent in the immediate aftermath of Pompey's defeat to Caesar, then one could safely assume this reasoning. The problem here is that these men had already accepted defeat and at first glance seemed content with returning to their normal duties.[18] Only after a prolonged sense of helplessness from being humiliated did these conspirators feel as they were perpetual subjects of Caesar thus, Caesar is there road-block to any kind of achievement. These factors, combined with the opposing senators who now felt belittled despite their loyalty to Caesar, united the Senators under the banner of killing Caesar to free their own interests. Evidently, it is quite clear that the focus around *Clementia* annoyed <https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-julius-caesars-assassination/>

men on both sides of the isle. Therefore, Caesar's Clemencia forced the men into the conspiracy, not out of revenge, but out of necessity for one's own career going forward.

What is the significance of Kingship and how did it affect the Senators?

Caesar's failure to distance himself from the possibility of Kingship led to his inevitable assassination from the fearful senators.[19]As discussed, Caesar had attracted both personal and political reasons for each conspirator to want him dead for their own personal gain. The Kingship " Scandal" as Suetonius puts it, demonstrates an ideological factor for the assassination of Caesar.[20]Personally, Cassius, Brutus and Decimus loathed for the death of Caesar to regain their personal nobility. Caesar's contempt for the senate reached a peak when a man placed a crown on one of his statues. This event became synonymous with Caesar, causing the Senate to believe Caesar's ideology contained zero respect for the nobility of the senate.

How this translates into the urge to kill Caesar is once again seen through the threat this poses to each senator. Caesar not only had growing power, he had policies that antagonized men and now he had the possible threat of Kingship. Although kingship has little deviation from his title as Dictator, the ideological importance of this is extremely important to the Roman people, specifically the noble senators. Kings at the time in Rome are viewed as an embodiment of tyranny and tyranny is despised by the Roman people. Therefore, the idea of a ' King' is extremely unpopular to the Roman people including the Senate. LR Taylor also writes that he believed Caesar wanted

to be appointed King thus, his unwillingness to distance himself from the title King is prevalent.[21]

For the interests of an individual senator, they simply could not allow a man to withhold this much power over them as it would belittle their roles in the Republic. Simply put, no man coming from the noble and “ elite” background like that of a senator would be aggregable enough to simply except the blatant disregard for and diminishing of their noble role. One can infer from this that the possibility of Caesar transforming his position to that of a King would have little effect in its practicality but, psychologically this will undermine their entire identity as a member of the elite-class in Roman society. Furthermore, Caesar began to behave in a more Authoritarian way. In one instance Caesar did not rise to thank the fathers when he received a decree from the Senators.[22]LR Taylor points out this instance became the tipping point for the motive to assassinate Caesar. It can be suggested that this event gave way for the Senators to assassinate Caesar out of disgust for his actions. However, I argue that the Senators are much more sophisticated and intelligent to commit such an act stemming from emotion. One can see this point through the planning of the assassination in and of itself.

The plot is organized, planned, has a chain of command and is not done in the immediate aftermath of a specific action from Caesar. Thus, the increasing closeness that Caesar exhibits to kingship causes the Senators to assassinate him because each Senator’s entire identity is in jeopardy. The conspiracy developed due to each conspirator fending for their personal freedom and not

Evidently, Caesar's rising power coupled with the diminishing influence of the Senate gave way for each Senator to join the conspiracy to protect their own nobility. The main conspirators like, Cassius, Brutus and Decimus spearheaded the plot to return the power from Caesar's hands back into their own to rebuild their personal influence on the Republic. Also, Caesar's policy of 'Clementia' upset Senators on both sides of this policy. Caesar became a roadblock to the Senators obtaining greater benefits and influence which is a significant cause for them wanting Caesar dead. Ultimately, Caesar's growing affiliation to a Kingship undermines the entire identity of each and every noble Senator thus, it gives a great incentive to want this growing threat to be moved out of the way of the Senators. Without a doubt, Caesar's growing power took power out of the hands of the exact people who had held that power for generations causing these extremely influential Senators to kill Caesar due to what they stood to personally gain from this.

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[2]Nicolaus Dam. 19. 58

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[6]Appian, *Civil Wars* 4. 113

[7]Appian, *Civil Wars* 4. 113

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[19]Suet. *Div. Jul.* 43

[20]Suet. *Div. Jul.* 43

[21]L. R. Taylor. *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar*

[22]L. R. Taylor. *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar*