

William shakespeare and julius caesar history essay



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Julius Caesar was born in Rome on July 12 or 13, in the year 100 B. C. His father was Gaius Caesar, who died when Caesar was only 16 years old. His mother Aurelia, was influential in his life. Cesar was part of Rome's nobility, known as patricians. In those times, a way to get recognition and gain influence was thru the escalation of political positions, and Caesar knew that very well. During his life, Caesar held many political positions; he was appointed " flamen dialis" with the help of his uncle by marriage, Gaius Marius in 86 B. C. Almost 20 years later, in 69 or 68 B. C., he was elected " quaestor". Around this time, his wife died. Caesar was a very clever person, and a natural politician. He married Pompeia, a relative of Pompey, a prominent roman, and who played an important role in his life. In a very short time, Caesar was able to achieve several political positions; " curule aedile" in 65 B. C., " pontifex maximus" in 63 B. C., and " praetor" in 62 B. C. Caesar was made governor of Spain in 61 B. C and a year after that; he formed the first triumvirate with Crassus and Pompey. This alliance between Pompey and Caesar was solidified even further when Pompey married Julia, Caesar's daughter.

Caesar continued his rise in the political arena; he was elected consul in 59 B. C. and a year after that, he was appointed governor of Roman Gaul. During his 8 year tenure, he managed to complete the conquest of the Gallic Gaul. Around this time, Caesar's political career took a violent turn. In 49 B. C., Caesar was directed by the Senate to lay down his command and return as a normal citizen. The alliances of the past with Crassus and Pompey changed. Crassus died in 53 B. C., and Pompey's wife, Julia died in 54 B. C.,

breaking the family ties between Pompey and Caesar. Pompey was then appointed sole consul in 52 B. C.

After he was ordered to lay down his power, Caesar decided to march on to Italy crossing the Rubicon River, and challenged those orders, starting the Roman Civil War. Pompey left Italy, leaving it to Caesar, who took control in 3 months. He then took Spain and continued to follow Pompey all the way to Egypt where he was hiding. In 48 B. C., Pompey was murdered by the Egyptians. With Pompey dead, and with no meaningful resistance, in 48 B. C., Caesar assumed the title of dictator. He returned to Rome in 47 B. C. but not for long. He spent the next two years in small campaigns from Africa to Spain to handle his opponents' small attempts of resistance. In 45 B. C., Caesar finally returned to Rome to deal with the empire.

On March 15, 44 B. C., a day known as the Ides of March, Caesar was murdered at the senate house, stabbed 23 times, in an assassination plot that included 60 senators, including Gaius Cassius and Marcus Junius Brutus. After the assassination, Rome fell into a civil war that lasted for 13 yrs.

How did William Shakespeare characterize Julio Caesar?

Caesar was portrayed as great Roman general and senator, recently returned to Rome triumphant after a successful military campaign.

Differently from the historical background, Shakespeare writings do not reflect the political ambitions of Caesar, actually, suggesting the opposite.

However, he is described as a person that is unable to separate his public life from his private life, and, enjoys the popularity and increasing idealization

and idolization of his image, to the point that he ignores prophecies and threats against his life, believing himself eternal.

William Shakespeare characterize Julio Caesar in the following way:

Cassius compares Caesar with a wolf:

“ So why Caesar be a tyrant? Poor man! He’s only a wolf because he sees that Romans are like sheep.” Act 1, Scene 3.

Brutus said that Caesar never let his heart control his decisions:

“ And to be frank about Caesar, I’ve never known a time when his heart ruled his head” Act 2, Scene 1

Caesar was a very suspicious man:

I want fat men around me, with smooth-combed hair, who sleep soundly at night...Such men are dangerous. Act 1 Scene 2

Caesar was an honest man:

Have I made such extensive conquest, only to be afraid to telling old men the truth? Act 2 Scene 2

Does the real Caesar want to be a Tyrant?

I do think that Caesar’s intentions were to become a tyrant because:

He reduce the power of the Senate even though he increased the number of people in the senate from 300 to 900 senators

In 59 B. C. he formed the First Triumvirate with Pompey and Crassus. Each of the three, by previous agreement, took charge of various parts of the government and control of portions of the empire.

In 49 B. C. the Senate ordered Caesar to return to Rome as a private citizen. Instead, Caesar crossed the Rubicon River, his legions behind him, and began a civil war against his opposition.

Who was Brutus in the play? Who was the historical Brutus?

Brutus in the Play:

Brutus was a supporter of the republic and what it represents. He believes Caesar is the opposite of the ideal he believes in. He is portrayed as Caesar's friend, but opposes the idea of having any single man in the position of a dictator, and he believed Caesar aspires to that position. Brutus's beliefs, made easy to Caesar's enemies to manipulate him in believing that Caesar must die in order to preserve the republic. Facing this situation, Brutus decides in favor of the republic, or the benefit of the people is greater than one man. His idealism contrasts against the motivation of the other conspirators. Brutus truly believes that Caesar's death will benefit Rome. Unlike Caesar, Brutus makes a clear separation between his public life from his private life. His divided personal and public loyalties are an important element of the plot.

The historical Brutus:

Brutus was a Roman politician, leader of the conspirators, who assassinated Julius Caesar in 44 BC. He joined Pompey's army against Caesar in the civil
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war (49), but was pardoned by Caesar after Pompey's death. He joined the plot to murder Caesar, as his way to restore the Roman republic. After Caesar's death, he and Gaius Cassius tried to gain control, only to be defeated by Mark Antony and Octavian. He committed suicide after his defeat.

The play depicts Rome at a time of transition between republic and empire—a time in which, theoretically, the Roman people were losing power. Why were the senators in the play afraid that Caesar would implement changes to the government of Rome (from a Republic to an Empire)?

The senators were afraid that the popularity of Caesar would help him to obtain the power and total control of the Republic.

Flavius said: “ If you find any statues of Caesar with crowns or decorations on them, take them off.” Act 1 Scene 1

Cassius said: “ In the name of all gods combined, what special meat does Caesar eat to make him grow so great? It's a disgrace to our times!” Act 1 Scene 2

Brutus said: “ For myself, I've no personal reason to clash swords with him – it's solely for the welfare of the people. He'll take the crown.” Act 2 Scene 1

Explain the difference between a republic and an empire.

A republic is a form of government in which the head of state is not a monarch and the people (or at least a part of its people) have an impact on its government. The word “ republic” is derived from the Latin phrase res

publica, which can be translated as “ a public affair”. A republic is run by a senate and other assemblies.

The term empire derives from the Latin imperium. Politically, an empire is a geographically extensive group of states and peoples united and ruled either by a monarch (emperor, empress) or an oligarchy.

Does William Shakespeare capture the reality of the history of Rome?

William Shakespeare captured most of the reality of Rome. For example, they show in the play how Julius Caesar refuses the crown because he was noble and honest but, the real reason is because he had gained so much military experience he decided to keep the army and move illegally to Italy, by crossing the Rubicon River, to later defeat Pompey in a civil war.

Shakespeare represents the ancient Roman world in a correct way: an era where people are hypocritical and trying to get power at all costs.

Shakespeare describes Caesar not only as a great leader and a hero, who was followed by a huge army and many people, but also as a human being which longs for power, which leads him to solitude and being surrounded by fake friends and political friends. In the play on the triumvirate formed of Octaves, Lepidus, and Antony, it said that Octaves and Antony succeeded, but in real life the one who didn't die and succeeded was Octaves. Antony committed suicide with Cleopatra.

Though Julius Caesar focuses on the struggles between powerful men, what role did the plebeians, or common people, play?

During Julius Caesar era plebeian-dominated assemblies won the power to make decisions binding on all of Rome. The common people, as shown by Shakespeare as being a mean-spirited crowd. They are well moved by this or that way. They are irrational and possess a very little spirit of freedom. Their sympathies are easily moved.

Explain the differences between patricians and common people.

The patricians were the elite aristocrats that held public office and were landowners, while the common people or plebeians were the poor farmers that couldn't be elected for public office and were often oppressed.

Explain the conflicts between patricians and commoners in Rome.

The plebeians weren't happy with how they were treated. They felt that they were not treated as equals, because they couldn't be part of the government or marry into patrician families among other things, and so they decided to leave Rome. The patricians avoided this with the promise of a system of law that was in the end ignored by the patricians and things remained almost as they were.

What happened after Julius Caesar's death in Rome's history? What happens in the play?

After Caesar was assassinated, Rome experienced 13 years of civil war. The Roman Empire remained for more than five hundred years, and the Roman influence continues to this day. His victories created the world's largest empire of its age.

In the play Caesar's mixing of his public image with his private persona, is a contributing factor to his death as he thought he was " eternal". Still, in many ways, Caesar's faith that he is eternal proves valid by the end of the play: by Act 5, Scene 3, Brutus is attributing his and Cassius's misfortunes to Caesar's power reaching from beyond the grave. He was also the inspiration for Octaves and Antony and strengthening their determination. Even Octaves decision to assume the title " Caesar", Caesar's permanence is established in some respect.