



Julius Caesar Biography

Dictator, General (c. 100 BCE–44 BCE)

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Quick Facts

Name

Julius Caesar

Occupation

[Dictator, General](#)

Birth Date

c. [July 12, 100](#) BCE

Death Date

[March 15, 44](#) BCE

Place of Birth

[Rome, Italy](#)

Place of Death

[Rome, Italy](#)

AKA

Julius Caesar

Full Name

Gaius Julius Caesar

Roman general and statesman Julius Caesar turned the Roman Republic into the powerful Roman Empire. A coup ended his reign, and his life, on the Ides of March.

Synopsis

Allegedly, a descendent of Trojan prince Aeneas, Julius Caesar's auspicious birth, c. July 12 or 13, 100 B.C., marked the beginning of a new chapter in Roman history. By age 31, Caesar had fought in several wars and become involved in Roman politics. After several alliances, he became dictator of the Roman Empire. This led to a senatorial coup, and Caesar's eventual assassination, on the Ides of March.

Early Years

A politically adept and popular leader of the Roman Republic, Julius Caesar significantly transformed what became known as the Roman Empire, by greatly expanding its geographic reach and establishing its imperial system.

While it has long been disputed, it's estimated that Julius Caesar was born in Rome on July 12 or 13, 100 BC. While he hailed from Roman aristocrats, his family was far from rich. When Caesar was 16 his father, Gaius Caesar, died. He remained close to his mother, Aurelia.

The Rome of Caesar's youth was unstable. An element of disorder ruled the Republic, which had discredited its nobility and seemed unable to handle its considerable size and influence.

At around the time of his father's death, Caesar made a concerted effort to side with the country's nobility. His marriage to Cornelia, the daughter of a noble, had drawn the ire of Rome's dictator, Sulla, who ordered the young Roman to divorce his wife or risk losing his property. Caesar refused and found escape in the military, serving first in the province of Asia and then in Cilicia.

Following the death of Sulla, Caesar returned to Rome to begin his career in politics as a prosecuting advocate. He relocated temporarily to Rhodes to study philosophy, but during his travels there was kidnapped by pirates. In a daring display of his negotiation and counter-insurgency tactics, he convinced his captors to raise his ransom. He then organized a naval force to attack them. The pirates were captured and executed.

His stature was enhanced further in 74 BC when he put together a private army and combated Mithradates VI Eupator, king of Pontus, who had declared war on Rome.

When Caesar returned to Rome he began to work with Pompey, a former lieutenant under Sully, who'd switched sides following the dictator's death. Not long after, in 68 or 69 BC, Caesar was elected quaestor (a base political office) and then went to serve in several other key government positions under Pompey.

His personal life meanwhile offered up tragedy when his wife, Cornelia, passed away in 69 BC. Two years later he remarried, taking Pompeia, a distant relative of Pompey, as his wife. Their marriage lasted just a few years, and in 62 BC the couple divorced.

Caesar's political ascendancy, however, continued. In 61-60 BC he served as governor of the Roman province of Spain. He also continued his close alliance with Pompey, which enabled him to get elected as consul, a powerful government position, in 59 BC.

Early Rule

As Caesar was cultivating his political partnership with Pompey, the astute leader was also aligning himself with Marcus Licinius Crassus, a Roman general and politician who'd served valiantly during Sulla's rule.

Crassus proved to be instrumental in Caesar's rise to power. A leader himself, and cited as the wealthiest man in Roman history, Crassus offered financial and political support to Caesar.

Over the years Pompey and Crassus had come to be intense rivals. But once again Caesar displayed his abilities as a negotiator, earning the trust of both men and convincing them they'd be better suited as allies instead of enemies.

This partnership among the three men came to be known as the First Triumvirate. For Caesar, this political alliance and the power it gave him was the perfect springboard to greater domination.

An early controversial move came when he tried to pay off Pompey's soldiers by granting them public lands. While initially unpopular, Caesar hired a collection of Pompey's soldiers to stage a riot. In the midst of all the chaos, he got his way.

Not long after, Caesar secured the governorship of Gaul (now France and Belgium), allowing him to build a bigger military and begin the kind of campaigns that would cement his status as one of Rome's all-time great leaders. Between 58 and 50 BC, Caesar conquered the rest of Gaul, up to the river Rhine. As he expanded his reach, he also showed his ruthlessness with his enemies. In one instance he waited until his opponents' water supply had gone dry, and then ordered the hands of all the remaining survivors be cut off.

Even while he conquered Gaul, Caesar was mindful of the political scene back home, and he hired key political agents to act on his behalf in Rome.

But Pompey, who grew envious of his political partner's power and prestige, did not meet Caesar's growing stature with enthusiasm. Meanwhile, Crassus still had never completely overcome his disdain for Pompey. The three leaders patched things up temporarily in 56 BC at a conference in Luca that cemented Caesar's existing territorial rule for another five years, and granted Crassus a five-year term in Syria and Pompey a five-year term in Spain.

Three years later, however, Crassus was killed in a battle in Syria. Around this time Pompey revisited his old concerns about Caesar.

The Dictator

Through a series of events, Caesar eventually went to war against Pompey, leading troops across the river Rubicon on January 10-11, 49 BC. With Pompey further aligning himself with nobility, and the nobility increasingly seeing Caesar as a national threat, civil war proved to be inevitable.

But Pompey and his troops were no a match for Caesar and his military campaign. By the end of 48 BC, Caesar had pushed his enemies out of Italy and pursued Pompey into Egypt, where he was eventually killed. There, Caesar aligned himself with Cleopatra, with whom he had a son, Caesarion.

Upon his return to Rome, Caesar was made dictator for life and hailed as the Father of his Country. For Caesar and his countrymen, his rule proved instrumental in reforming Rome.

He would serve just a year's term before his assassination, but in that short period Caesar greatly transformed the empire. He relieved debt and reformed the Senate by increasing its size and opening it up so that it better represented Romans as a whole. He reformed the Roman calendar and reorganized how local government was constructed. In addition he resurrected two city-states, Carthage and Corinth, which had been destroyed by his predecessors, and he granted citizenship to a number of foreigners. He also proved to be a benevolent victor by inviting some of his defeated rivals to join him in the government.

But Caesar was also careful to solidify his power and rule. He stuffed the Senate with allies, and required the same body to grant him honors and titles. He was allowed to speak first at assembly meetings, and Roman coins bore his face.

Assassination

Caesar's reforms greatly enhanced his standing with Rome's lower- and middle-class populations. But his popularity with the Senate was another matter. Envy and concern over Caesar's increasing power led to angst among a number of politicians who saw in him an aspiring king. History had shown that Romans had no desire for monarchical rule. Legend had it that by the time Caesar came to power it had been five centuries since they'd last allowed a king to rule them.

Caesar's wish to include his former Roman enemies in the government helped spell his downfall. Gaius Cassius Longinus and Marcus Junius Brutus were both former enemies who'd joined the Senate. Together, the two of them led the assassination of Caesar on the Ides of March (the 15th), 44 BC.

It's not altogether clear whether Caesar knew ahead of time of the plot to kill him. What was clear, though, was that the conspirators, who dubbed themselves "the liberators," needed to act

fast. By all accounts Caesar had plans to leave Rome on March 18 for a military campaign in what is now modern-day Iraq. There he hoped to avenge the losses suffered by Crassus.

Brutus' involvement in the killing packed the most complicated backstory. He had originally sided with Pompey during Rome's earlier civil war, but then had been encouraged to join the government after Caesar's victory. His mother, Servilia, was also one of Caesar's lovers.

Following Caesar's death, a power struggle ensued in Rome, leading to the end of the Roman Republic. A mob of lower- and middle-class Romans gathered at Caesar's funeral, with the angry crowd attacking the homes of Cassius and Brutus.

Caesar quickly became a martyr in the new Roman Empire, and just two years after his death he became the first Roman figure to be deified. The Senate also gave him the title "The Divine Julius."

Playing on the late ruler's popularity, Caesar's great-grandnephew, Gaius Octavian, assembled an army to fight back the military troops defending Cassius and Brutus. His victory over Caesar's assassins allowed Octavian, who would assume the name Augustus, to take power in 27 BC and become the first Roman emperor.

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