Document-Based Assessment

Julius Caesar: Father of the Roman Empire

Julius Caesar has been called the father of the Roman empire and the most influential man in European history. After Caesar’s assassination, his nephew Octavian declared him a god. The documents below are just a few of many impressions of him that writers, historians, and artists have left behind for centuries.

Document A

“Here is a story that while he was crossing the Alps he came to a small village with hardly any inhabitants and altogether a miserable-looking place. His friends were laughing and joking about it, saying: ‘No doubt here too one would find people trying hard to gain office, and here too there are struggles to get the first place [in government] and jealous rivalries among the great men.’ Caesar then said to them in all seriousness: ‘As far as I am concerned, I would rather be the first man here than the second in Rome.’”

—from Life of Caesar by Plutarch

Document B

“O mighty Caesar, dost thou lie so low? Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well. I know not, gentlemen, what you intend, who else must be let blood, who else is rank. If I myself, there is no hour so fit. As Caesar’s death’s hour, nor no instrument of half that worth as those your swords, made rich with the most noble blood of all this world.”

—from The Tragedy of Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare

Document C

“In eloquence and warlike achievements, he equaled at least, if he did not surpass, the greatest of men. . . . Cicero, in recounting to Brutus the famous orators, declares, ‘that he does not see that Caesar was inferior to any one of them’; and says, ‘that he had an elegant, splendid, noble, and magnificent vein of eloquence.’”

—from The Lives of the Twelve Caesars by Suetonius

Analyzing Documents

Use your knowledge of history and Documents A, B, C, and D to answer questions 1–4.

1. Which side of Caesar does Plutarch’s anecdote reveal?
   A his drive to be the best
   B his desire to serve Rome
   C his wish to reach high spiritual levels
   D his interest in having many areas of achievement

2. According to Shakespeare’s Mark Antony, Caesar was
   A cunning, cruel, and ambitious.
   B weak, foolish, and condescending.
   C honorable, noble, and great.
   D humble, kind, and compassionate.

3. What about Caesar did Cicero admire?
   A that he was a cunning strategist
   B that he was a practical and realistic leader
   C that he was a humble and kind man
   D that he was an engaging and talented speaker

4. Writing Task Julius Caesar was murdered more than 2,000 years ago. Why has he continued to be a figure of interest through modern times?
The Assassination of Julius Caesar, 44 BC

In January of 49 BC, Julius Caesar led his army across the Rubicon River in Northern Italy (see Caesar Crosses the Rubicon, 49 BC) and plunged the Roman Republic into civil war. Caesar's rival, Pompey, fled to Greece. Within three months Caesar controlled the entire Italian peninsula and in Spain had defeated the legions loyal to Pompey.

Caesar now pursued Pompey to Greece. Although outnumbered, Caesar crushed the forces of his enemy but not before Pompey escaped to Egypt. Following Pompey to Egypt, Caesar was presented with his rival's severed head as a token of friendship. Before leaving the region, Caesar established Cleopatra as his surrogate ruler of Egypt. Caesar defeated his remaining rivals in North Africa in 47 BC and returned to Rome with his authority firmly established.

Caesar continued to consolidate his power and in February 44 BC, he declared himself dictator for life. This act, along with his continual effort to adorn himself with the trappings of power, turned many in the Senate against him. Sixty members of the Senate concluded that the only resolution to the problem was to assassinate Caesar.

Death of a Dictator

Nicolaus of Damascus wrote his account of the murder of Caesar a few years after the event. He was not actually present when the assassination occurred but had the opportunity to speak with those who were. He was a friend of Herod the Great and gathered his information during a visit to Rome. His account is thought to be reliable.

The Plan:

"The conspirators never met openly, but they assembled a few at a time in each others' homes. There were many discussions and proposals, as might be expected, while they investigated how and where to execute their design. Some suggested that they should make the attempt as he was going along the Sacred Way, which was one of his favorite walks. Another idea was for it to be done at the elections during which he bad to cross a bridge to appoint the magistrates in the Campus Martius; they should draw lots for some to push him from the bridge and for others to run up and kill him. A third plan was to wait for a coming gladiatorial show. The advantage of that would be that, because of the show, no suspicion would be aroused if arms were seen prepared for the attempt. But the majority opinion favored killing him while he sat in the Senate, where he would be by himself since non-Senators would not be admitted, and where the many conspirators could hide their daggers beneath their toga. This plan won the day."

Brutus Persuades Caesar to Ignore his Apprehensions:

"...his friends were alarmed at certain rumors and tried to stop him going to the Senate-house, as did his doctors, for he was suffering from one of his occasional dizzy spells. His wife, Calpurnia, especially, who was frightened by some visions in her dreams, clung to him and said that she would not let him go out that day. But Brutus, one of the conspirators who was then thought of as a firm friend, came up and said, 'What is this, Caesar? Are you a man to pay attention to a woman's dreams and the idle gossip of stupid men, and to insult the Senate by not going out, although it has honored you and has been specially summoned by you? But listen to me, cast aside the forebodings of all these people, and come. The Senate has been in session waiting for you since early this morning.' This swayed Caesar and he left."

Bad Omens:

"Before he entered the chamber, the priests brought up the victims for him to make what was to be his last sacrifice. The omens were clearly unfavorable. After this unsuccessful sacrifice, the priests made repeated other ones, to see if anything more propitious might appear than what had already been revealed to them. In the end they said that they could not clearly see the divine intent, for there was some transparent, malignant spirit hidden in the victims. Caesar was annoyed and abandoned divination till sunset, though the priests continued all the more with their efforts.

Those of the murderers present were delighted at all this, though Caesar's friends asked him to put off the meeting of the Senate for that day because of what the priests had said, and he agreed to do this. But some attendants came up, calling him and saying that the Senate was full. He glanced at his friends, but Brutus approached him again and said, 'Come, good sir, pay no attention to the babblings of these men, and do not postpone what Caesar and his mighty power has seen fit to arrange. Make your own courage your favorable omen.' He convinced Caesar with these words, took him by the right hand, and led him to the Senate which was quite near. Caesar followed in silence."

The Attack:

"The Senate rose in respect for his position when they saw him entering. Those who were to have part in the plot stood near him. Right next to him went Tullius Cicero, whose brother had been exiled by Caesar. Under pretext of a humble request on behalf of this brother, Cicero approached and grasped the mantle of his toga, seeming to want to make a more positive move with his hands upon Caesar. Caesar wanted to get up and use his hands, but was prevented by Cicero and became exceedingly annoyed.

That was the moment for the men to set to work. All quickly unheathed their daggers and rushed at him. First Servilius Casca struck him with the point of the blade on the left shoulder a little above the collar-bone. He had been aiming for that, but in the excitement he missed. Caesar rose to defend himself, and in the uproar Casca shouted out in Greek to his brother. The letter heard him and drew his sword into the ribs. After a moment, Cassius made a slash at his face, and Decimus Brutus placed him in the side. While Cassius Longinus was trying to give him another blow he missed and struck Marcus Brutus on the hand. Minucius also hit out at Caesar and hit Rubrius in the thigh. They were just like men doing battle against him.

Under the mass of wounds, he fell at the foot of Pompey's statue. Everyone wanted to seem to have had some part in the murder, and there was not one of them who failed to strike his body as it lay there, until, wounded thirty-five times, he breathed his last."

References:

The untimely deaths of those two great lovers and superstars of antiquity, Caesar and Cleopatra, undoubtedly amplified their celebrity. But the facts of his assassination and her suicide, mythologized by Shakespeare and by countless novels and films, can get lost in the glare of the legend.

To start, neither Caesar nor Cleopatra was especially attractive; when he met Cleopatra, Caesar was full-faced and balding, while the beauty of the great Egyptian queen, in the words of the ancient historian Plutarch, "was by no means flawless or even remarkable." What each had—and recognized in the other—was a vigorous charm, and a gift for amassing power.

When he met Cleopatra, Gaius Julius Caesar was, in fact, the most powerful man in the world, the ruler of the Roman Empire from 59 to 44 BC. After returning from a victorious military campaign in the East, on Feb. 14, 44 BC, Caesar declared himself dictator perpetuus, dictator for life. But several senators grew concerned that Caesar’s power would threaten the republican nature of the Roman government. They were also concerned about his developing relationship with Cleopatra, who was then feuding with her siblings for Egypt's throne. Though she now might be associated with Egypt, Cleopatra was actually considered Greek. Her family, the Ptolemies, had ruled Egypt for three centuries and cloaked a largely Greek administrative and legal system with a veneer of Egyptian customs to satisfy the natives.

Many of the senators objected to a union between Rome and her traditional enemy, the Greeks. Their discontent grew strong enough to cause a cadre of senators to turn conspiratorial—and for a plan to assassinate Caesar, led by his main rival Cassius, to emerge.

**Murder at the Senate**

The Senate had scheduled a meeting for March 15, purportedly for routine business, and the conspirators chose that date, known as the Ides of March, for an attack. They were able to recruit a few of Caesar's close friends into the scheme, including Cassius's brother-in-law, Marcus Brutus, by suggesting that Caesar was going to declare himself king on that day. In all, the conspiracy attracted about 60 people, with 20—all senators—to do the killing; the collective responsibility implicit in the act would allow them to transfer power to the Senate.

The tradition of the Ides of March notwithstanding, Caesar actually heeded personal premonitions and his wife’s advice to stay home that day (each had had disturbing dreams the night before). But Cassius recruited a friend of Caesar's to persuade him to come to the Senate meeting. As he left his house, someone—we do not know who—thrust a note into his hand. It went unread.

Caesar arrived at the Senate at around 11 A.M. He almost immediately received a petition and as he read it, the senators crowded around him. At the signal, one of them grasped Caesar's robe and pulled it down at the neck, and the designated first striker (a tribune of the people,
named Casca] made a poorly executed stab that barely grazed Caesar's chest. But as Caesar tried to defend himself, he opened himself up to attack by the others.

Blinded by blood, Caesar covered his head with his robe. He said nothing until he saw Marcus Brutus make a thrust; his response was not *Et tu, Brute* ("You too, Brutus"). What he actually said was "You too, my child?". Caesar had a long affair with Brutus's mother and suspected he might be Brutus's father. Caesar received 23 wounds, only one of which could be called fatal. The note, which they found in his hands after his death, fully disclosed the conspiracy. Had it been read, history would have been deprived of one of its most famous episodes.

**CLEOPATRA IN CHAINS**

Meanwhile, Cleopatra was busy consolidating her power. Two years after Caesar's assassination, she took Mark Antony, one of the triumvirates who now ruled the eastern part of the Roman Empire, as her lover. At Cleopatra's behest, Antony murdered the last of Cleopatra's Ptolemy rivals, and the two devoted themselves to a life of debauchery. Antony even left his Roman wife and married the Egyptian queen. His infatuation with Cleopatra began to incense those back in Rome, and eventually, Octavian, Caesar's heir, declared war on her. Antony and Cleopatra marshaled their troops, but they were no match for the might of the Roman army and navy; Cleopatra was taken prisoner by Octavian, who planned to march her through the streets of Rome.

However, the defiant Cleopatra committed suicide in her chamber to foil Octavian's plan—not out of grief over the death of Antony, who had himself committed suicide days before. Plutarch, the first-century Greek historian, is responsible for the story that her death was caused by the bite of an asp, smuggled into her room in a basket of figs. However, the tale cannot be substantiated. The asp was traditionally a symbol of the Egyptian royalty and would have added a nice touch. But, then again, witnesses did notice two marks on her arm.

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**CLEOPATRA FOR THE AGES... IN HOLLYWOOD**

Cecil B. DeMille's lavishly produced *Cleopatra* in 1934 featured Claudette Colbert as the Egyptian Queen; she played Cleopatra as a saucy coquette.

Apparently, DeMille thought he should have a chat with Colbert before casting her, thinking the final scene—Cleopatra committing suicide by clutching an asp to her breast—might frighten her. Before the scene, in which Colbert would mount the throne of Egypt for the last time, DeMille called an enormous snake around himself and walked onto the set. "Oh, Mr. DeMille, don't come near me with that!" she exclaimed. "Well," said DeMille, "how about this?" He showed her a snake the size of an Egyptian asp. "That little thing? Give it to me!" she cried, and played the scene flawlessly. The 1962 version of the story, starring Elizabeth Taylor, was a box office disappointment but a remarkable role for the actress. It had a huge budget and was a feast for the eyes, but left something to be desired in terms of historical accuracy.
A Portrait of Julius Caesar

When Julius Caesar was born in the year 100 BC, Rome was a republic. When he died fifty-six years later, Rome was a dictatorship on its way to becoming an empire. Julius Caesar was in large part responsible for this transition.

Although born into a patrician family and therefore assured of elite status in Roman society, his family was at the lower rung of the social ladder without influence and prestige. Caesar's accomplishments in later life were a result of his own unbridled ambition, talent and a little luck.

He became a spell-binding orator able to sway others to his will through the force of his words. He was an accomplished writer who eloquently advertised his own achievements. He was a brilliant military leader, who over nine years of continuous fighting conquered Gaul adding modern-day France, parts of Switzerland and the Low Countries to Rome's possessions. With the strength of his victorious legion backing him up, Julius Caesar marched on the city of Rome and grabbed the reigns of power. Julius Caesar was a man who changed history.

*The Roman historian Suetonius provides us with some insight into the character and personality of Julius Caesar:*

"He was tall, of a fair complexion, round limbed, rather full faced, with eyes black and piercing; he enjoyed excellent health except toward the close of his life when he was subject to sudden fainting fits and disturbances in his sleep. He was likewise twice seized with the 'falling sickness,' while engaged in active service.

He was extremely nice in the care of his person, and kept the hair of his head closely cut and had his face smoothly shaved. His baldness gave him much uneasiness, having often found himself on that score exposed to the jibes of his enemies. He used therefore to brush forward the hair from the crown of his head, and of all the honors conferred on him by the Senate and People, there was none which he either accepted or used with greater pleasure than the right of wearing constantly a laurel crown.

It is said that he was particular in his dress, for he wore the (special toga only Roman senators could wear) with fringes about the wrists, and always had it girded about him, but rather loosely.
Julius Caesar Crosses the Rubicon, 49 BC

The crossing of a small stream in northern Italy became one of ancient history's most pivotal events. From it sprang the Roman Empire and the genesis of modern European culture.

Born with unbridled political ambition and unsurpassed oratory skills, Julius Caesar manipulated his way to the position of consul of Rome in 59 BC. After his year of service he was named governor of Gaul where he amassed a personal fortune and exhibited his outstanding military skill in subduing the native Celtic and Germanic tribes. Caesar's popularity with the people soared, presenting a threat to the power of the Senate and to Pompey, who held power in Rome. Accordingly, the Senate called upon Caesar to resign his command and disband his army or risk being declared an "Enemy of the State". Pompey was entrusted with enforcing this edict - the foundation for civil war was laid.

It was January 49 BC, Caesar was staying in the northern Italian city of Ravenna and he had a decision to make. Either he acquiesced to the Senate's command or he moved southward to confront Pompey and plunge the Roman Republic into a bloody civil war. An ancient Roman law forbade any general from crossing the Rubicon River and entering Italy proper with a standing army. To do so was treason. This tiny stream would reveal Caesar's intentions and mark the point of no return.

The Die is Cast

Suetonius was a Roman historian and biographer. He served briefly as secretary to Emperor Hadrian (some say he lost his position because he became too close to the emperor's wife.) His position gave him access to privileged imperial documents, correspondence and diaries upon which he based his accounts. For this reason, his descriptions are considered credible. We join Suetonius's narrative as Caesar receives the news that his allies in the Senate have been forced to leave Rome:

"When the news came [to Ravenna, where Caesar was staying] that the interposition of the tribunes in his favor had been utterly rejected, and that they themselves had fled Rome, he immediately sent forward some cohorts, yet secretly, to prevent any suspicion of his plan; and to keep up appearances, he attended the public games and examined the model of a fencing school which he proposed building, then - as usual - sat down to table with a large company of friends.
JULIUS CAESAR: HERO OR VILLAIN

Gaius Julius Caesar, who would become the first Emperor of Rome, was born on 13 July, 100 B.C.E. He was born at a chaotic time in Roman history, brought about largely by the rapid expansion of the Roman Empire. The first 20 years of Caesar’s life were characterized by rivalries between the Senate and the Assembly. The electoral system in Rome was also corrupt (crooked or dishonest).

When Consul Sulla returned to Rome in 83 B.C.E. after fighting abroad, he began a campaign to get rid of his enemies. Several thousand senators and other officials were murdered. Sulla then had the Senate declare him dictator for life. Caesar, now in his early twenties, had married the daughter of one of Sulla’s enemies and the dictator demanded that he divorce her. Caesar, however, refused to do so. Perhaps to escape the rage of Sulla, Caesar joined the staff of Minurius Thermas, the Praetor (judge) in Bithynia (northern Turkey) in 81 B.C.E.

When the death of Sulla was announced in 78, Caesar returned to Rome. For several years he sharpened his skills as a lawyer. Then, in 75, he studied under Appollonius Molon in Rhodes. On his way to Rhodes he was captured by pirates, staying with them for six weeks. While with them he told them he would return and crucify them. On his release he did exactly that.

In 69 B.C.E he came back to Rome and became friends with Crassus, a rich and powerful former Praetor (Judge) who became incredibly wealthy by taking the property of the people that Sulla had killed. Caesar threw magnificent games for the masses, paid for by Crassus. This made Caesar hugely popular with the people. Caesar was then given his first military command and became the Governor of Gaul (present day France).

Back in Rome, political violence was continuing. General Pompey was elected sole consul following the burning to the ground of the Senate building and the murder of many of its members. Caesar saw his opportunity to take control and, knowing that he had the people behind him, he decided to try and overthrow Pompey. While Pompey had more soldiers, Caesar had the support of the people. As Caesar closed in on Rome Pompey abandoned the city. Caesar set out in pursuit, chasing him across the continent. Finally, after several engagements (battles), Pompey fled to Egypt, requesting that King Ptolemy XIII protect him. Instead the king had him beheaded.

Julius Caesar was now supreme ruler of the Roman Empire. A grateful nation turned Caesar into a God-like figure. The Senate, which he had enlarged from 500 to 900, to include more representation for the common people, gave him the title Pater Patriae (Father of the Country). The month of Quintilis was also renamed in his honor (July).

After rising to power, he set up tax reforms in the conquered provinces and imposed penalties for misconduct by provincial governors. He also canceled all the loan payments for the poor for a year, and launched a huge building program to give jobs to the poor. He allowed Italians from northern Italy as well as people from Gaul to become citizens as well as Senators. Moreover, he granted army veterans land parcels in the provinces to reward them for their service, he also gave them a bonus of 5,000 denarii, when they only made 125 denarii yearly. He also gave the poor of Rome free land.

Caesar's reforms did not come without a price, however. After defeating his enemies inside and outside Rome, he assumed all power in the role of dictator for life. He and he alone would shape Rome's future; he and he alone would determine its destiny. Those who supported the continuation of the Republican government saw their power vanishing. They would have no voice in government; there would be no democracy. To be sure, there had been dictators in Rome before Caesar. But they had assumed only temporary dictatorial power, not permanent power.

Some people in the Senate despised his absolute power and planned to get rid of him. On the 15th of March, 44 B.C.E Caesar set out for the Senate and sat in his Regal chair. Tullius Cimber approached him, grabbed Caesars toga and exposed his neck. At this signal another conspirator rushed in and tried to stab Caesar in the throat. Caesar, however, managed to fend him off. Then the other conspirators rushed in on the Emperor with knives. The rest of the Senate stood by and watched in horror. Julius Caesar was stabbed to death, receiving 23 wounds. He fell dead at the feet of Pompey’s statue.

Final Essay: Historians are divided on what they think of Julius Caesar. One side says he was a power hungry arrogant politician who got what he deserved. The other side feels that he made positive changes for Rome and was killed because he was helped the wrong people. In other words is Caesar a hero or a villain? Answer that question in essay form. Be sure to include numerous facts to back up your opinion. **INCLUDE A TOPIC SENTENCE!** (20 points)
Background:

In the years before Caesar became powerful, Rome was suffering from a great deal of disorder and violence. During the 80's B.C., two Roman leaders, Marius and Sulla had clashed for power. Their clash resulted in a bloodbath as first Marius and then Sulla killed the other's supporters. Sulla won and, in working to restore order, became a dictator and gave his friends in the Senate almost total control over the military and the courts. After Sulla died, the leader of the Roman province of Spain tried to make the province leaders equal in power to the Senate (Rome's top law making body, made up of wealthy Roman landowners). This revolt was put down by the general, Pompey. At the same time a slave leader, Spartacus, led a massive revolt of 70,000 slaves and peasants. Another general, Crassus, finally put down this revolt.

Stop here and discuss:

1. What problems did Rome have during this time?

2. Who were Pompey and Crassus and what special jobs did they do for Rome?
**First Triumvirate:**

While *Pompey* was in the East, *Crassus*, the general who had put down the slave revolt and who was also a very wealthy Senator, tried to increase his power at home by working with a man named *Julius Caesar*. Caesar was very popular with the people because his family had for many years supported democratic causes and as magistrate he had lavished money on public games and works project which employed common people.

To get control of Rome, the three men, Pompey (who brought soldiers and prestige), Crassus (who brought wealth), and Caesar (who brought influence over the common people) formed an alliance called the **First Triumvirate**. The men wanted to restore Rome's security by distributing choice offices and military commands to their friends and supporters. Caesar was given command of Gaul (what is now France and Germany) and Crassus was given command of the army in Parthia (modern Iran and Pakistan) and Pompey was given recognition for conquering the Mithridates and stayed at home in Rome.

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**Stop here and discuss:**

1. When Crassus, Caesar, and Pompey joined together, what strengths did each of them have?

2. Which was the most important of these strengths in your opinion? Why?

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After *Crassus* died in battle, competition for power between *Caesar* and *Pompey* became open conflict. *Caesar* was a brilliant commander and led his soldiers to many victories against the Germans. He added all the lands west of the Rhine River to the territory of Rome, including Britain. He wrote about these battles in popular diaries called "Commentaries," which were great propaganda pieces to show to the people what a good soldier he was. Caesar also dealt well with the Gauls. He treated them leniently, and his good sense made them trust him and remain loyal. The soldiers and the people loved him and wanted *Pompey* overthrown and *Caesar* to be their leader.
Caesar's Rule:

*Caesar* returned to Rome cheered by the people as its master, his authority having surpassed that of the Senate. He became king in all but name. He had his name stamped on coins, had his statue put in the temple and wore royal purple. He took power from the Senate and made the magistrates his appointees. But, he did not punish his enemies in the government by sending them from Rome as most earlier leaders had done.

He enacted many reforms to improve the economy. He limited the grain welfare program to those actually in need so that the capital city would not continue as a magnet for idle mobs. He established Roman colonies by giving land to the soldiers and landless peasants in Carthage and Corinth. He made a law which limited the number of slaves estates could employ so that the poor free people would have more work.

In the provinces (land conquered by Rome) he appointed new governors and made them strictly accountable so they would no longer simply plunder the people of all their wealth. He reduced taxes and made collections more fair. He allowed the people in Sicily, Spain and Gaul to become Roman citizens so they could participate in the central government as well as their local governments.

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**Stop here and discuss:**

1. What reforms did Caesar make which helped the poor?

2. What reforms did Caesar begin to make in the provinces? Were they good or bad for Rome? Why?

3. How did Caesar increase his power, and how do you think the Senators felt about this?