Julius Caesar and the Late Roman Republic: A Study of the Attitudes and Actions of Rome’s Leaders

Heath Madsen (Lindsay Adams)
Department of History
University of Utah

Gaius Julius Caesar was born amidst civil unrest and political strife. He was witness to the deaths of tens of thousands of people who fought and died for political hegemony. He was accustomed to violence, manipulations, machinations, corruption, extortion, and greed. When it came time for him to enter the political arena and begin competing with his peers, he was armed with a strong sense of the values of government among which he grew up. Rome’s Republic was anything but democratic and as the years advanced toward the civil war, which began in 49 B.C., it became clearer that the old system, by which Rome had been run for centuries, was fading.

He was a man of political genius and supreme adaptability and made good on his endeavors to reach the top office of the state in spite of those who tried to stand in his way. He was able to come off conqueror of his political opponents as well as his military opponents. His fame for political maneuvering was only exceeded by his genius and adaptability as a commander. In essence, he was successful because he understood how the Republican system of Rome worked and therefore became a star player in the political games of the times.

His actions and legislation are questioned today in like manner as they were in his lifetime. His operations may seem to us demagogic, rogue, and even revolutionary, but must be evaluated in the appropriate historical context. In context, his methods were novel and original without exceeding precedent.

This study explores his life as seen from several points of view and concludes that Julius Caesar was needed by Rome, the government, and the people, because the political system had ceased to function properly; it was controlled by many power-hungry men who sought for their own glory, honor, and position as leaders, more than they sought for the good of the people and the state.